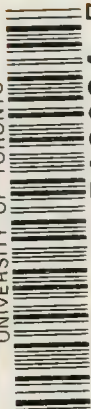


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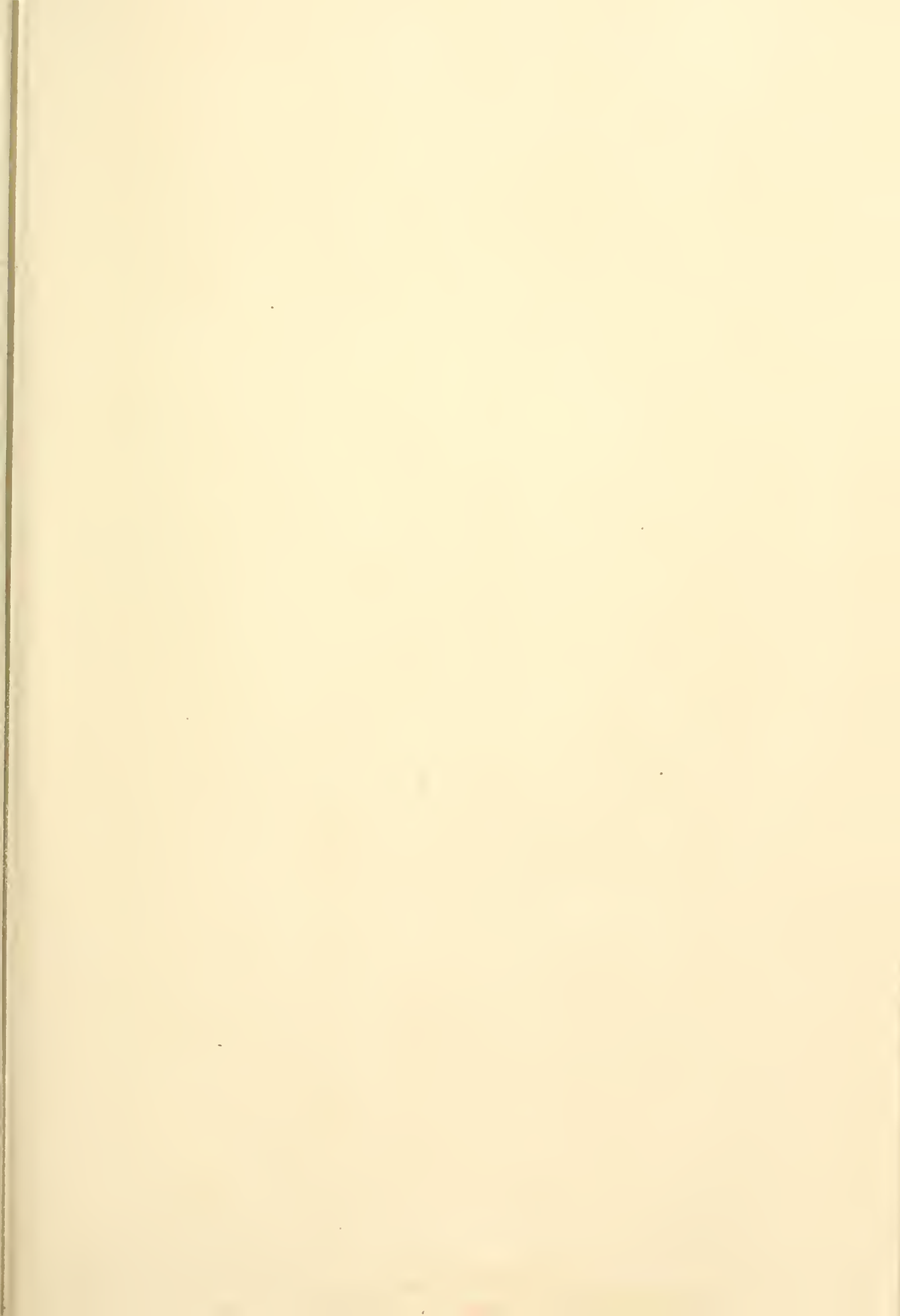
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La Dame de Monsoreau



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LA DAME DE MONSOREAU

BY

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

COMPLETE TRANSLATION

FROM THE LATEST FRENCH EDITION



NEW YORK

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LA DAME DE MONSOREAU.

CHAPTER I.

SAINT-LUC'S WEDDING.

AFTER the people's celebration of Shrove Sunday in the year 1578, just as the last murmurs of the joyous merry-making were dying away in the streets, a splendid festival was beginning in the magnificent hôtel, lately built on the other side of the water, almost fronting the Louvre, by that illustrious House of Montmorency, which was allied to the royal house of France and regarded itself as on a level with princely families. The object of this private festival, which followed the public festival, was to celebrate the wedding of François d'Epinay de Saint-Luc, the familiar friend and favorite of Henry III., with Jeanne de Cossé-Brissac, daughter of the French marshal of that name.

The banquet had taken place at the Louvre, and the King, who had consented to the marriage with the greatest reluctance, was present at the feast, but the harsh expression of his features was not at all in harmony with the occasion. His costume, too, was in keeping with his face: it was the dark maroon costume in which he is painted by Clouet at the wedding of Joyeuse, and his austere and majestic aspect, making him look like some royal spectre, struck every one with terror, especially the young bride, at whom he looked askance, whenever he did look at her.

And yet the sombre attitude of the King, in the midst of this fête, did not seem strange to the guests, for the cause of it was one of those court secrets along which courtiers glide with the greatest caution, knowing they are like those rocks that rise to the level of the sea and are fatal to the ships that touch them.

The banquet was hardly over before the King started up, and, of course, all the guests had to do the same, even those who acknowledged in a whisper their unwillingness to imitate the royal example.

Then Saint-Luc, after gazing long and earnestly on his wife's face, as if to draw courage from her eyes, approached the King.

"Sire," said he, "will your Majesty deign to be present at the entertainment which I am giving this evening in your honor at the Hôtel de Montmorency?"

Henry III. had turned round with a mixture of annoyance and anger, and, after Saint-Luc's request, proffered in the softest and most imploring tone and in his most winning manner, he answered:

"Yes, monsieur, we will go, although you certainly do not deserve this token of friendship on our part."

Then Mademoiselle de Brissac, now Madame de Saint-Luc, had humbly thanked the King. But Henri had turned his back on her, without making any reply to her thanks.

"What has the King against you, M. de Saint-Luc?" the wife had asked her husband.

"I will explain later on, my darling," said Saint-Luc, "when this angry mood of his has passed away."

"But will it pass?" asked Jeanne.

"Most certainly it will," answered the young man.

Mademoiselle de Brissac had not been Madame de Saint-Luc long enough to insist on a definite reply: she put a strong restraint on her curiosity, but with the firm purpose of making Saint-Luc speak out when the moment would be favorable for forcing him to confess.

Henry III. was expected, then, at the Hôtel de Montmorency just at the moment when the story we are about to relate to our readers opens. Now it was already eleven and the King had not yet arrived.

Saint-Luc had invited to this ball all whom the King, as well as himself, reckoned as friends; he had included in his invitations the princes and princes' favorites, especially those of our old acquaintance, the Duc d'Alençon, who had become the Duc d'Anjou on the accession of Henri III. to the throne; but, as the Duc d'Anjou had not been present at the banquet in the Louvre, it did not seem likely, either, that he would make his appearance at the fête in the Hôtel de Montmorency.

As for the King and Queen of Navarre, they had escaped, as we have related in a former work, into Navarre, and were now making open war on the King at the head of the Huguenots.

The Duc d'Anjou was also making a kind of war on him,

a war dark and underhand, a war in which he always took good care to keep in the background, thrusting to the front such of his friends as had not been cured by the fate of La Mole and Coconnas, whose terrible death can hardly have been yet forgotten by our readers.

As a matter of course, his gentlemen and those of the King lived on the worst possible terms, and there were, at least twice or thrice a month, hostile encounters between them, which seldom passed without some one of the combatants being killed or grievously wounded.

As for Catherine, she was at the height of her wishes : her best-beloved son was on that throne on which she had been so anxious to see him seated, for her own sake as well as for his ; and she reigned through him, while apparently caring nothing for the things of this world and anxious only about her salvation.

Saint-Luc, although becoming terribly uneasy when he saw that no member of the royal family showed any sign of appearing, did his best to reassure his father-in-law, whom this menacing absence was worrying. Convinced, like everybody, of the friendship of Henri for Saint-Luc, he had fancied that he was forming an alliance with the royal favor, and now it looked as if his daughter had, on the contrary, made a marriage with disgrace ! Saint-Luc did all he could to inspire him with a confidence he did not feel himself, and his friends, Maugiron, Schomberg, and Quélus, garbed in their most magnificent costumes, stiff in their splendid doublets, whose enormous ruffs looked like chargers on which their heads were resting, added to his dismay by their ironical lamentations.

"Good heavens, my poor friend !" exclaimed Jacques de Lévis, Comte de Quélus, "I 'm afraid it is all up with you at last ! The King will never forgive you for making fun of his opinions, and the Duc d'Anjou will never forgive you for making fun of his nose !"¹

"You are quite mistaken, Quélus," answered Saint-Luc. "The King is not coming because he is making a pilgrimage to the Minims² in the Bois de Vincennes, and the Duc d'Anjou is absent because he is in love with some woman I forgot to invite."

¹ The small-pox had so badly treated the Duc d'Anjou that he seemed to have two noses.

² An order of monks.

"You're not serious!" said Maugiron. "Did n't you see how the King looked at dinner? Was that the godly phiz of one just on the point of taking up his pilgrim's staff? And though the absence of the Duc d'Anjou could be explained by what you have just said, would that account for his Angevins not coming? Do you see a single soul of them here? Look — a total eclipse; not even that swash-buckler Bussy!"

"Ah, gentlemen," groaned the Duc de Brissac, shaking his head despairingly, "this, to my mind, has all the effect of a complete disgrace! Heavens above us! How can our house, which has always been so devoted to the monarchy, have displeased his Majesty?"

And the old courtier raised his arms in anguish to the skies.

The young men turned their eyes on Saint-Luc and burst into roars of laughter, and this, far from restoring the marshal's equanimity, made him more despondent than ever.

The young bride was plunged in serious thought, wondering, like her father, how Saint-Luc could have displeased the King.

But Saint-Luc knew, and this knowledge rendered him even more anxious than the others.

And then, all of a sudden, at one of the two doors that gave entrance into the hall the King was announced. "Ah!" cried the marshal, radiant with joy, "now I fear nothing, and if only the Duc d'Anjou were announced, my satisfaction would be complete."

"And as for me," murmured Saint-Luc, "I am in much more dread of the King, now that he is here, than if he were away, for he comes to do me some ill turn or other, just as the Duc d'Anjou stays away for the same purpose."

But this gloomy reflection did not hinder him from hurrying to meet the King, who had doffed his sombre maroon costume and was resplendent in satin, plumes, and precious stones.

However, just at the moment when Henri III. appeared at one of the doors another Henry III. appeared at the door opposite, and this royal personage was exactly garbed like the first, with the same make-up of the face and hair, the same ruff, and the same boots. The courtiers, carried along for a moment in the direction of the first, stopped, as the waves do at the pier of an arch, and, with many a whirl, ebbed back from the first King to the second.

Henri III. took note of the movement, and seeing nothing

before him but open mouths, bewildered eyes, and bodies pirouetting on one leg:

"Come now, gentlemen," said he, "will none of you explain the meaning of all this?"

A prolonged burst of laughter was the answer.

The King, naturally impatient, and at this moment more so than ever, frowned. Saint-Luc drew near him.

"Sire," said he, "it is Chicot, your jester; he is dressed exactly like your Majesty, and is giving the ladies his hand to kiss."

Henri III. laughed. Chicot enjoyed the same freedom at the court of the last of the Valois that Triboulet had enjoyed, thirty years before, at the court of Francis I., and which Langely was to enjoy, forty years later, at the court of Louis XIII.

One reason for this was that Chicot was no ordinary fool. Before he had taken the name of "Chicot" he was known as "*De Chicot*." He was a Gascon gentleman who had been wrongfully treated by the Duc de Mayenne because of a love-affair in which he was the latter's rival, and his triumphant rival also, although a mere private gentleman. He fled to the court of Henri III., and he paid amply for the protection afforded him by the truths — occasionally unpleasant ones — which he dinned into the ears of the successor of Charles IX.

"Come now, Master Chicot," said Henri, "don't you think two kings here just one too many?"

"Then, you let me play my part as king my own way, and you play the part of the Duc d'Anjou your way; maybe you will be taken for him and told things from which you might learn, not what he thinks, but what he does."

"Hum!" muttered Henri, with an ill-tempered glance around him, "my brother d'Anjou is not come."

"The more reason why you should take his place. The thing is settled: I am Henri, you are François; I ascend the throne, you will dance; for your sake I'll flit through all the mummeries connected with the crown, while, during this time, you will have a chance of amusing yourself, poor King!"

The eyes of the King rested on Saint-Luc.

"You are right, Chicot, I will dance," said he.

"Decidedly," thought Brissac, "I was mistaken in thinking the King angry with us. On the contrary, he is in the best of humor."

And he ran right and left, congratulating every one he met, but particularly himself, on having given his daughter to a man who enjoyed his Majesty's favor to such a high degree.

Meanwhile, Saint-Luc had come close to his wife. Mademoiselle de Brissac was not a beauty ; but her dark eyes were charming, her teeth pearly, and her complexion was dazzling.

With one single thought always in her mind, she addressed her husband :

"Monsieur, why have I been told the King was angry with me ? Why, ever since he came, he has done nothing but smile at me !"

"That was not what you said after returning from the banquet, my dear, for his look then frightened you."

"His Majesty may have been ungracious at the time," returned the young woman, "but now" —

"Now it is far worse," interrupted Saint-Luc ; "he smiles with closed lips. It would please me better if he showed his teeth. Jeanne, my poor darling, the King has some treacherous surprise in store for us. Oh, do not gaze at me so tenderly, I beseech you ! — nay, even turn your back on me. And, by the way, Maugiron is coming up to us. Talk with him, keep him all to yourself, and be very friendly with him."

"Are you aware, monsieur," retorted Jeanne, with a smile, "that your recommendation is a very singular one, and, if I followed it literally, why, people might think" —

"Ah !" said Saint-Luc, with a sigh, "it would be a very fortunate thing if they did."

And turning his back on his wife, whose amazement was now beyond expression, he started to pay his court to Chicot, who was acting his part as king with a dash and majesty that were as ludicrous as could be.

Meanwhile, Henry was profiting by the holiday Chicot had granted him from regal toil ; but although he danced, he kept his eyes on Saint-Luc. Sometimes he called him to listen to a jocose observation, which, whether witty or the reverse, sent Saint-Luc into roars ; sometimes he offered him out of his comfit-box burnt almonds and iced fruit, which Saint-Luc declared delicious. If he left the hall for a moment to attend to his guests in the other apartments the King sent an officer or one of Saint-Luc's kinsmen for him immediately, and Saint-Luc had to return, with a smile for his master, who seemed unhappy when he was out of his sight.

Suddenly a sound so loud that it could be heard above all the tumult came to the ears of Henri.

"Hush!" said he. "Why, surely that must be Chicot's voice. Do you hear, Saint-Luc? The King is angry."

"Yes, sire," said Saint-Luc, without seeming to notice the covert allusion of his Majesty, "he is apparently quarrelling with some one or other."

"Go and see what is the matter, and return at once with the news."

Saint-Luc withdrew.

And, in fact, it was Chicot, who was crying out, in the nasal tones used by the King on certain occasions,

"I have issued sumptuary edicts, however. But if they are not numerous enough, I will issue more; I will issue so many that you'll have enough of them; if they be not good, at least you'll have enough of them to content ye. Six pages, M. de Bussy! By the horn of Beelzebub, cousin, this is too much!"

And Chicot, puffing out his cheeks, arching his hips, and putting his hand to his side, imitated the King to perfection.

"What is he saying about Bussy?" asked the King, frowning.

Saint-Luc, who had returned, was about to answer, when the crowd opened and six pages appeared in sight, clad in cloth of gold, covered with carcanets, and having on their breasts their master's arms, sparkling in precious stones.

Behind them came a young man, handsome and haughty. He walked with head erect and a scornful light in his eyes. There was a contemptuous expression in the fold of his lips, and his plain dress of black velvet contrasted strikingly with the rich garb of these pages.

"Bussy!" "Bussy d'Amboise!" was repeated from mouth to mouth. And every one ran to meet the young man who created all this excitement, and then stood aside to let him pass.

Maugiron, Schomberg, and Quélus had drawn near to the King, as if to defend him.

"Hullo!" said the first, alluding to the unexpected presence of Bussy and the continued absence of the Duc d'Alençon, to whom Bussy belonged, — "hullo! the valet we have, but we don't see the valet's master."

"Patience!" rejoined Quélus; "in front of the valet we

have had the valet's valets; the valet's master is, perhaps, coming behind the first valets' master."

"I say, Saint-Luc," said Schomberg, youngest of Henri's minions and also one of the bravest, "do you know that M. de Bussy is doing you very little honor? Don't you notice his black doublet? God's death! is that the sort of dress for a wedding? Eh?"

"No," retorted Quélus, — "for a funeral!"

"Ah!" murmured Henri, "why should it not be for his own — and worn in advance of the ceremony?"

"For all that, Saint-Luc," said Maugiron, "M. d'Anjou does not follow Bussy. Might it be that you are in disgrace in that quarter *also*?"

The *also* smote Saint-Luc to the heart.

"But why should he follow Bussy?" replied Quélus. "Surely you must remember that when his Majesty did M. de Bussy the honor of asking him to belong to himself, M. de Bussy's answer was that, being of the House of Clermont, there was no reason why he should belong to anybody, and he was satisfied with belonging purely and solely to himself, being confident he should find in himself the best prince in the world."

The King frowned and bit his mustache.

"Say what you like about it," returned Maugiron, "to my mind he is M. d'Anjou's servant, beyond a doubt."

"Then," retorted Quélus coolly, "it is so because M. d'Anjou is a greater lord than the King."

This observation was the most poignant that could be made in Henri's presence, for he had ever had a quite brotherly detestation for the Duc d'Anjou.

So, although he did not utter a syllable, he was seen to turn pale.

"Come, come, gentlemen," Saint-Luc ventured, in trembling tones, "have a little charity for my guests; do not spoil my wedding-day."

This remark probably recalled Henri to another train of thought.

"Yes," said he, "we must not spoil Saint-Luc's wedding-day, gentlemen."

And he twisted his mustache, uttering the words in a mocking tone that did not escape the poor husband.

"So," cried Schomberg, "Bussy is now connected with the Brissacs, is he not?"

"How?" said Maugiron.

"Why, you see Saint-Luc defends him. What the devil! in this poor world of ours where we have enough to do to defend ourselves, we defend only our relations, allies, and friends; at least, that's my idea."

"Gentlemen," said Saint-Luc, "M. de Bussy is neither my ally, friend, nor relation: he is my guest."

The King darted an angry look at Saint-Luc.

"And besides," the latter hastened to say, terrified by the look of the King, "I am not defending him the least bit in the world."

Bussy walked behind his pages with an air of great seriousness and was drawing near to salute the King, when Chicot, hurt that any but himself should have priority in rank, cried:

"Ho, there! Bussy, Bussy d'Amboise, Louis de Clermont, Count de Bussy, — since it seemeth we must give thee all thy names, to the end that thou mayest recognize it is to thee we speak. Dost not see the true Henri? Dost not distinguish the King from the fool? He whom thou goest to is Chicot, my fool, my jester, a fellow who worketh so many antic follies that sometimes he makes me almost die from laughing."

Bussy continued his way until he was in front of Henri. He was about to make his bow, when Henri said:

"Do you not hear, M. de Bussy? You are called."

And, in the midst of a roar of laughter from his minions, he turned his back on the young captain.

Bussy reddened with anger. But checking his first impulse, he pretended to take the remark of the King seriously; and, without seeming to have noticed the merriment of Quélus, Maugiron, and Schomberg, or their insolent smiles, he turned back to Chicot.

"Ah, you must pardon me, sire!" said he, "there are kings who bear such a close resemblance to buffoons that you will, I hope, excuse me for taking your buffoon for a king."

"Eh!" murmured Henri, turning round; "what is that he's saying?"

"Nothing, sire," said Saint-Luc, who, that evening, appeared really to have received from Heaven the mission of pacificator, "nothing, really."

"No matter, Master Bussy!" cried Chicot, standing on tip-toe, as the King did when he wanted to look majestic, "your conduct was unpardonable."

"Sire," answered Bussy, "pardon me. I was preoccupied."

"With your pages, monsieur?" retorted Chicot, crossly. "God's death, man! you are ruining yourself in pages. Why, it is encroaching on our prerogatives!"

"How can that be?" said Bussy, who saw that by giving the jester a loose rein he should make it all the unpleasant for the King. "I beseech your Majesty to explain; and if I have in truth done wrong I am ready to confess my sin in all humility."

"Cloth of gold on these rapscallions! Did one ever hear the like?" exclaimed Chicot, pointing to the pages; "while you, a nobleman, a colonel, a Clermont, almost a prince, in fact, are dressed in plain black velvet."

"Sire," said Bussy, facing the King's minions, "the reason is obvious. At a time when we see rapscallions in the dress of princes, I think it is good taste for princes, in order to mark the difference between them, to dress like rapscallions."

And he repaid the splendidly apparelled and jewelled young minions with the same insolent smile they had bestowed on him a moment before.

Henri saw his favorites turn pale with fury. They seemed just to be waiting for a word from their master to fling themselves on Bussy. Quélus, the most enraged of any of them with this gentleman, whom he would have already fought but for the King's express prohibition, had his hand on his sword-hilt.

"Do you refer to me and mine in these remarks of yours?" cried Chicot, who, having usurped the King's seat, answered as Henri might have answered.

And the jester, while speaking, assumed an attitude of such extravagant swagger that one-half of those present burst out laughing. The other half did not laugh, for a very simple reason: the half that laughed, laughed at the other half.

However, three of Bussy's friends, believing perhaps there was going to be a scuffle, came and took their places near him. They were Charles Balzac d'Entragues, better known as Antragnet, François d'Andie, Vicomte de Ribeirac, and Livarot.

On seeing these hostile preliminaries Saint-Luc guessed that Bussy had come by order of Monsieur, with the intention of creating a scandal or sending a challenge. He trembled more than ever, for he felt he was caught between the flaming rage of two powerful enemies who selected his house as their field of battle.

He ran up to Quélus, apparently the most violent of them all, and laying his hand on the hilt of the young man's sword :

"For God's sake !" said he, "keep quiet, my friend, and let us wait."

"Egad ! you can keep quiet if it suit you !" he cried. "The blow of that booby's fist has fallen on your cheek as well as on mine : he who says anything against one of us says it against all of us, and he who says it against all of us touches the King."

"Quélus, Quélus," said Saint-Luc, "think of the Due d'Anjou, who is behind Bussy, the more on the watch because he is absent, the more to be dreaded because he is invisible. You will not surely insult me by believing, I hope, that I am afraid of the valet, though I am of the master."

"And, God's death !" cried Quélus, "what has any one to fear when he belongs to the King of France ? If we get into danger for his sake, the King of France will defend us."

"You, yes ; but me !" said Saint-Luc, piteously.

"Ah ! but why the devil did you also go and marry, when you knew how jealous the King is in his friendships ?"

"Good !" said Saint-Luc to himself, "every one is thinking only of his own interests ; then I must not forget mine, and as I want to have a quiet life, at least during the first fortnight of my marriage, I'll try to make a friend of M. d'Anjou." And thereupon he left Quélus and advanced toward Bussy.

After his impertinent apostrophe Bussy had raised his head proudly and looked round every part of the hall, on the watch for any impertinence that would be a retort on his own. But every head was turned aside, every mouth dumb : some were afraid of approving, in presence of the King ; others of disapproving, in the presence of Bussy.

The latter, seeing Saint-Luc approach, thought that at length he had found what he was on the watch for.

"Monsieur," said he, "do I owe the honor of the conversation with me which you seem to desire to what I have just said ?"

"What you have just said ?" asked Saint-Luc, in his most gracious manner. "Pray, what have you said ? I heard nothing of it, certainly. No, as soon as I saw you, I wished to have the pleasure of bidding you welcome, and, while doing so, offering my sincere thanks for the honor your presence here confers on my house."

Bussy was a man of superior quality in everything. Brave to rashness, he was at the same time scholarly, sharp-witted, and most interesting in company; he knew Saint-Luc's courage and saw clearly that at this moment the duty of the host had got the better of the touchiness of the duellist. If it had been any person else he would have repeated his phrase, that is to say, his challenge; but he contented himself with bowing profoundly to Saint-Luc and thanking him in some gracious words.

"Oho!" said Henri, on seeing Saint-Luc so close to Bussy. "I fancy my young rooster is pitching into the braggadocio. He has done right, but I don't want him to be killed. You, Quélus, then, go and see — But no, not you, Quélus, you're too hot-headed. You see to the matter, Maugiron."

Saint-Luc, however, did not let him approach Bussy, but met him on the way, and together they returned to the King.

"What were you saying to that coxcomb Bussy?" inquired the King.

"I, sire?"

"Yes, you."

"I bade him good evening," said Saint-Luc.

"Oh, indeed! that was all, was it?" growled the King.

Saint-Luc saw he had made a blunder.

"I bade him good evening, and told him I should have the honor to bid him good day to-morrow morning," he returned.

"Good!" said Henri. "I suspected as much, you madcap."

"But will your gracious Majesty deign to keep my secret?" added Saint-Luc, affecting to speak in a whisper.

"Oh, *pardieu!*" returned Henri, "it is not because I want to stand between you that I speak of the matter. Assuredly, if you could rid me of the fellow without getting a scratch yourself" —

The minions exchanged rapid glances, which Henri appeared not to notice.

"For the fact is," continued the King, "the rascal's insolence is beyond" —

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Saint-Luc. "But you may rest assured, sire, he'll find his master some day or other."

"Humph!" grumbled the King, shaking his head up and down, "he knows what he's about when he has a sword in his hand! I wish to Heaven some mad dog would bite him; that would put him out of the way in a fashion that would suit us better than any other."

And he flashed a look at Bussy, who, attended by his three friends, was walking up and down, jostling and jibing at those he knew to be especially hostile to the Duc d'Anjou, and, consequently, the King's greatest friends.

"*Corbleu!*" cried Chicot, "don't maul my noble minions in this fashion, Master Bussy, for, though I am a king, I can wield a sword just as well as if I were a jester, no better and no worse."

"Hah! the rascal!" murmured Henri: "upon my word his view of the matter is right enough."

"Sire," said Maugiron, "if Chicot does not stop these scurvy jests, I'll be obliged to chastise him."

"Don't meddle with him, Maugiron; Chicot is a gentleman and very ticklish on the point of honor. Besides, he is not the one who deserves chastisement the most, for he is not the one that is most insolent."

This time it was impossible to be mistaken. Quélus made a sign to D'O and D'Épernon, who, being engaged elsewhere, had had no share in all that had just passed.

"Gentlemen," said Quélus, leading them aside, "I want you to take counsel together. As for you, Saint-Luc, you had better have a talk with the King and finish making your peace with him. In my opinion the matter has begun favorably."

Saint-Luc preferred this course, and approached the King and Chicot, who were having words.

Quélus, on his side, led his friends to a recess in one of the windows.

"Now," asked d'Épernon, "I should just like to know what you mean. I was in a fair way of making myself agreeable to Joyeuse's wife, and I give you fair warning that if your story is not of the most interesting description I'll never forgive you."

"My meaning is, gentlemen," answered Quélus, "that, after the ball, I am going at once a-hunting."

"Good!" said D'O, "a-hunting what?"

"A-hunting the wild boar."

"What bee have you got in your bonnet? Have you a fancy for getting yourself disembowelled in some thicket in this freezing weather?"

"No matter; I'm off."

"Alone?"

"No, with Mangiron and Schomberg. We go a-hunting for the King."

"Ah, yes, now I understand," said Schomberg and Mangiron in unison.

"The King wishes a boar's head to-morrow for breakfast."

"With the neck dressed *à l'italienne*," said Mangiron, alluding to the simple turn-down collar which Bussy wore, to mark his dislike of the ruffs of the minions.

"Aha!" said D'Épernon, "good! I'm one of the party, then."

"But what in the devil are you all driving at?" inquired D'O. "I am altogether at sea."

"Eh? Look around you, my darling."

"Well! I'm looking."

"And is there any one there who has laughed in your face?"

"Bussy, as I imagine."

"Well, then! Don't you think you have before your eyes a boar whose head would be pleasing to the King?"

"You believe the King would" — said D'O.

"'T is he who asks for it," answered Quélus.

"So be it, then! The hunt is up! But how shall we do our hunting?"

"Under cover; it is the surest."

Bussy noticed the conference, and having no doubt that he was the subject of it, approached, a sneer on his lips, with his friends.

"Look, Antragnet! Look, Ribeirac!" said he; "how closely they are grouped together! Isn't it quite touching? It makes you think of Euryalus and Nisus, Damon and Pythias, Castor and — But, by the way, where is Pollux?"

"Pollux is married," said Antragnet, "so that Castor is left all alone."

"What can they be doing there?" asked Bussy, with an insolent glance in their direction.

"I should wager they are plotting the invention of some new kind of starch," said Ribeirac.

"No, gentlemen," said Quélus, smiling, "we were talking about hunting."

"Really, Signor Cupid," said Bussy, "it is very cold weather for hunting. You'll get your skin all chapped."

"Monsieur," replied Mangiron, in the same polite tone, "we have very warm gloves and our doublets are lined with fur."

"Ah, I am reassured. Does the hunt take place soon?"

"Well, perhaps to-night," said Schomberg.

"There is no perhaps; to-night, certainly," added Maugiron.

"In that case, I must warn the King," said Bussy. "What would his Majesty say if he discovered to-morrow that all his friends had caught colds?"

"Don't give yourself the trouble of warning the King, monsieur," said Quélus; "his Majesty knows already that we are going a-hunting."

"Larks?" asked Bussy, in his most insulting manner.

"No, monsieur," said Quélus. "We hunt the boar. We must have a boar's head. It is absolutely needed."

"And the animal?" inquired Antragnet.

"Is started," said Schomberg.

"But still you ought to know where it will pass?" asked Livarot.

"We shall try to learn," said D'O. "Would you like to hunt with us, M. de Bussy?"

"No," answered the latter, continuing the conversation in the same tone; "in fact, I cannot. To-morrow I must visit M. d'Anjou and take part in the reception of M. de Monsoreau, to whom Monseigneur has, as you are aware, given the post of grand huntsman."

"But to-night?" asked Quélus.

"Ah, to-night I cannot, either; I have a rendezvous in a mysterious house in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine."

"Aha!" said D'Épernon; "so Queen Margot is incognita in Paris, M. de Bussy, for we have learned that you became La Mole's heir."

"Yes, but I renounced my inheritance some time ago, and the person in question is n't the same at all."

"And so this person expects you in the Rue du Faubourg Saint-Antoine?" inquired D'O.

"Quite correct. And, by the way, I should like to have your advice, M. de Quélus."

"You can have it. Although not a lawyer, I rather pride myself on giving good advice, particularly to my friends."

"The streets of Paris are said to be very unsafe; the Faubourg Saint-Antoine is a very isolated quarter. What road would you advise me to take?"

"Faith," said Quélus, "as the Louvre boatman will doubtless spend the night waiting for you, if I were in your

place, monsieur, I should take the ferry at the Pré-aux-Cleres, turn the tower at the corner, follow the quay up to the Grand-Châtelet, and then reach the Faubourg Saint-Antoine by the Rue de la Tixeranderie. Once at the end of the Rue Saint-Antoine, if you pass the Hôtel des Fournelles without accident, you will probably arrive safe and sound at the mysterious rendezvous of which you have just told us."

"Thanks for your direction, M. de Quélus," said Bussy. "You mention the ferry at the Pré-aux-Cleres, the tower at the corner, the quay up to the Grand-Châtelet, the Rue de la Tixeranderie, and the Rue Saint-Antoine. Nothing can be clearer. You may rest assured I shall not depart an inch from the route."

And saluting the five friends he withdrew, saying in quite a loud voice to Balzac d'Entragues: "Decidedly, Antragnet, we are losing our time with those fellows: it's time to be off."

Livarot and Ribeirac laughed as they followed Bussy and D'Entragues, who walked before them, not forgetting to turn round often.

The minions remained calm; they seemed determined not to understand.

As Bussy was crossing the last salon, in which was stationed Madame de Saint-Luc, who never took her eyes off her husband, Saint-Luc made her a sign, and glanced at the Due d'Anjou's favorite. Jeanne, with that clear-sightedness which is the privilege of women, understood at once, and running up, stopped the gentleman in his progress.

"Oh, M. de Bussy," said she, "every one is talking of a sonnet of yours, and I am told it is" —

"Against the King, madame?" asked Bussy.

"No, in honor of the Queen. You must repeat it to me."

"With pleasure, madame," said Bussy, and offering her his arm he moved along, reciting the sonnet requested.

During this time, Saint-Luc returned softly to the minions, and heard Quélus saying:

"The animal will not be difficult to stalk, we know his tracks; so, then, at the corner of the Hôtel des Fournelles, near the Porte Saint-Antoine, opposite the Hôtel Saint-Pol."

"And each of us with a lackey?" inquired D'Épernon.

"No, no, Nogaret; no," said Quélus. "let us be alone, and keep our own secret, and do our own work. I hate him, but it

would shame me to have a lackey's stick touch him ; he is too much of the gentleman for that."

"Do the whole six of us go out together?" asked Maugiron.

"The whole five, not the whole six of us, by any means," said Saint-Luc.

"True, we had forgotten you had taken a wife. We were looking on you as still a bachelor," said Schomberg.

"And, in fact," continued D'O, "the least we could do would be to let poor Saint-Luc stay with his wife the first night of his marriage."

"You are out there, gentlemen," said Saint-Luc; "it is not my wife that keeps me; though you will agree she's well worth staying for; it is the King."

"What! the King?"

"Yes, his Majesty has ordered me to escort him back to the Louvre."

The young men looked at him with a smile Saint-Luc vainly tried to understand.

"You see how it is," said Quélus, "the King is so extravagantly fond of you he cannot do without you."

"Besides, we have no need of Saint-Luc," said Schomberg. "Let us leave him, then, to his King and his lady."

"Hum! the beast is formidable," said D'Épernon.

"Bah!" retorted Quélus, "just set me in front of it. give me a good boar-spear, and leave the rest to me."

The voice of Henri was heard calling for Saint-Luc.

"Gentlemen," said he, "you understand, the King is calling for me. Good luck to your hunting and good-by."

And he left them immediately. But instead of going to the King he glided along the walls where there were still spectators and dancers, and reached the door where Bussy was standing, retained by the fair bride, who was doing her best to prevent him from going farther.

"Ah, good evening, M. de Saint-Luc," said the young man. "But — Why, you look quite scared! Do you, perchance, form one of the great hunting-party that is preparing? That would redound to your courage, but scarcely to your chivalry."

"Monsieur," answered Saint-Luc, "I looked scared because I have been seeking you."

"Indeed!"

"And because I was afraid you were gone. My dear

Jeanne," he added, "tell your father to try and detain the King awhile. I must say a few words to M. de Bussy in private."

Jeanne hurried off. All this was a mystery to her; but she yielded, feeling that the matter was important.

"What do you want to say to me, M. de Saint-Luc?" asked Bussy.

"I wanted to say, M. le Comte," replied Saint-Luc, "that if you had any rendezvous this evening you would do well to adjourn it till to-morrow, for the streets of Paris are unsafe, and that, if this rendezvous was likely to lead you in the direction of the Bastile, you would do well to avoid the Hôtel des Tournelles, where there is a nook in which several men could hide. This is what I had to tell you, M. de Bussy. God forbid I should think a man like you could be frightened! I only ask you to reflect on what I have said."

At this moment was heard the voice of Chicot crying:

"Saint-Luc! My little Saint-Luc! come, now, don't try to hide as you are doing. You can see very well that I'm waiting for you to return to the Louvre."

"Sire, here I am," answered Saint-Luc, hastening in the direction of Chicot's voice.

Near the jester stood Henri III., to whom a page was already handing his heavy ermine-lined cloak, while another presented thick gloves that reached to the elbow, and a third, the velvet-lined mask.

"Sire," said Saint-Luc, addressing both the Henris at once, "I am about to have the honor of lighting you to your litters."

"Not at all," replied Henri, "Chicot is going his way, and I am going mine. My friends are all scamps, letting me find my way alone to the Louvre, while they are having their fun and frisking about in the mummeries of the carnival. I had counted on them, and this is how they treat me. Now, you understand you cannot let me set out in this style. You are a sober, married man; it is your duty to bring me back safe to my wife. Come along, my friend, come. Ho there! a horse for M. de Saint-Luc — But no, it's useless," he added, as if on second thought. "My litter is wide; there is room for two."

Jeanne de Brissac had not lost a word of this conversation. She wished to speak, say a word to her husband, warn her father that the King was carrying off her husband; but Saint-

Luc, placing a finger on his lips, indicated the necessity for silence and circumspection.

"*Peste!*" he murmured, "now that I am reconciled with François d'Anjou, I'm not going to quarrel with Henri de Valois. Sire," he added aloud, "here I am, so devoted to your Majesty that if you ordered me to follow you to the end of the world I should do so."

There was a mighty tumult, then mighty genuflexions, then a mighty silence, and all to hear the adieus of the King to Mademoiselle de Brissac and her father. They were charming.

Then the horses pawed the court-yard, the torches cast a red glare on the windows. At length, with a half-laugh and a half-shiver, fled into the shadow and the fog the royal courtiers and the wedding-guests.

Jeanne, now alone with her women, entered her chamber and knelt before the image of a saint to whom she had a particular devotion. Then she asked them to retire and have a collation ready for her husband on his return.

M. de Brissac did more. He sent six guards to wait for the young husband at the gate of the Louvre and escort him home. But, after ten hours' waiting, the guards sent one of their comrades to inform the marshal that all the gates of the Louvre were shut, and that, before the last was closed, the captain of the watch had said:

"You need not wait any longer, it's useless: no person can now leave the Louvre to-night. His Majesty has gone to bed, and every one else is asleep."

The marshal carried this news to his daughter, who declared that she was too anxious to go to bed, and would sit up and wait for her husband.

CHAPTER II.

NOT EVERY ONE THAT OPENS THE DOOR ENTERS THE HOUSE.

THE Porte Saint-Antoine was a sort of stone arch, not unlike the Porte Saint-Denis and the Porte Saint-Martin of the present day, only it was connected on the left with the buildings adjacent to the Bastille, and so was, in some sort, attached to the ancient fortress.

The space on the right between the gate and the Hôtel de

Bretagne was wide, dark, and muddy: but this space was little frequented by day and entirely deserted by night, for nocturnal wayfarers seemed to have made for themselves a road quite close to the fortress, in order to place themselves, to some extent, under the protection of the sentry of the keep, at a time when the streets were dens of cut-throats, and watchmen were almost unknown. If the sentry could not come to their assistance, he would, at least, be able to call for help and frighten the malefactors off by his cries.

Of course, on winter nights, travellers were a good deal more timid than on summer ones.

The night during which the events we have already related, or are about to relate, took place, was so chilly and dark, the sky being hidden by black, low-lying clouds, that it was impossible to get a glimpse of the welcome presence of the sentinel behind the battlements of the royal fortress, who would himself have had great difficulty in making out the people who passed beneath him.

Within the city no house rose in front of the Porte Saint-Antoine. Only huge walls could be discerned: the walls of the Church of Saint-Paul, on the right, and those of the Hôtel des Tournelles, on the left. At the end of this hôtel, in the Rue Saint-Catherine, was the nook of which Saint-Luc had spoken to Bussy.

Then came the block of buildings, situated between the Rue de Jony and the Rue Saint-Antoine, which, at this period, faced the Rue des Billettes and Sainte Catherine's Church.

Moreover, not a single lantern lit up the part of old Paris which we have just described. On those nights during which the moon took on herself the task of illuminating the earth, the gigantic Bastille arose in all her sombre and motionless majesty, standing out in vigorous relief against the starry vault of heaven. On the other hand, during dark nights, all that could be seen in the place which she occupied was a denser blackness, pierced at intervals by the pale lights of a few windows.

During this night, which had begun with a rather sharp frost, and was to end with a rather heavy snowfall, no sound echoed to the steps of a traveller on the kind of causeway which, as we have mentioned, had been made on the soil by the feet of timid and belated wayfarers, prudently taking a roundabout course for very good reasons.

But, on the other hand, a practised eye would have been able to distinguish in the angle of the wall of Les Tournelles several dark shadows that moved enough to show they belonged to poor devils with human bodies, tasked to their utmost to preserve the natural warmth which their immobility was every moment depriving them of, and yet they seemed to have voluntarily condemned themselves to this same immobility, apparently in expectation of something happening.

The sentry on the tower, who could not see anything in the square on account of the darkness, could not hear anything, either, on account of the low tones in which the conversation of these black shadows was conducted. And still the conversation did not lack a certain interest.

"That madman Bussy was right after all," said one of these shadows. "It is just such a night as we used to have at Warsaw, when King Henri was King of Poland; and if it continue, as was predicted, our skins will crack all over."

"Humbug! Maugiron, you lament like a woman," replied another of the shadows. "It is n't warm, I confess; but draw your cloak over your eyes and stick your hands in your pockets and you won't feel a bit cold."

"Oh, you can speak at your ease, Schomberg," said a third shadow; "it's easy seeing you're a German. As for myself, my lips are bleeding and my mustache is stiff with icicles."

"It's my hands that's the trouble. I'll lay a bet with any one I no longer have a hand. Upon my soul, I will."

"Why did n't you bring mamma's muff along with you, my poor Quélus?" replied Schomberg. "The dear woman would have lent it to you, especially if you had told her that you wanted it for the purpose of ridding her of her dear Bussy, whom she loves as the devil does holy-water."

"Ah, good heaven! can't you have patience?" said a fifth voice. "I am pretty sure you'll soon be complaining that it's too hot you are."

"Heaven grant that your words turn out true, D'Épernon!" said Maugiron, stamping to get his feet warm.

"It was n't I that spoke," said D'Épernon, "it was D'O. I'm afraid to utter a word; it might freeze."

"What were you saying?" asked Quélus of Maugiron.

"D'O was saying we'd be soon too warm, and I answered: 'God grant that your words turn out true!'"

"Well, I fancy God must have heard you, for I see something yonder coming along the Rue Saint-Paul."

"You're mistaken. Can't be he."

"And why?"

"Because he mentioned another route."

"Would it be so strange if he suspected something and changed it?"

"You don't know Bussy. Where he said he'd go, he'll go though the very devil lay in wait to bar his passage."

"Still," answered Quélus, "there are two men coming along."

"Faith, you're right," repeated two or three voices, recognizing the truth of the statement.

"In that case, let us charge," said Schomberg.

"A moment," said D'Épernon; "we don't want to kill honest citizens or virtuous midwives. Stay! they have stopped."

In fact, at the end of the Rue Saint-Antoine the two persons who had attracted the attention of our five companions had stopped, as if in uncertainty.

"Hah!" said Quélus, "do you think they saw us?"

"What nonsense you're talking! Why we can hardly see ourselves."

"You're right," answered Quélus. "Look! they're turning to the left—they're stopping before a house—they're searching."

"Faith, there's no doubt about it."

"It looks as if they wanted to go in," said Schomberg. "Eh! hold on. Would he be trying to escape us?"

"But it isn't he, since he is to go to the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, while you fellows, after coming out of the Rue de Saint-Paul, went down the street," answered Mangiron.

"Indeed!" said Schomberg. "And how do you know that your artful friend has n't given you a false route, either casually and carelessly, or maliciously and intentionally?"

"I don't deny it might be so," said Quélus.

This hypothesis made the whole band of gentlemen bound to their feet like a pack of famished hounds. They abandoned their retreat, and, sword in hand, rushed on the two men standing before the door.

One of them had introduced a key into the lock, the door had yielded and was about to open, when the noise made by their assailants compelled the two mysterious night-walkers to raise their heads.

"What does this mean?" asked the smaller of the two, turning to his companion. "Do you think it likely, Aurilly, that we are the object of their attack?"

"I am afraid, monseigneur," answered the person who had just turned the key in the door, "that it looks very much like it. Shall you give your name or keep to your incognito?"

"Armed men! An ambush!"

"Some jealous lover on guard. *Vrai Dieu!* monseigneur, I told you the lady was too beautiful not to be courted."

"In, quick, Aurilly: we can stand a siege better inside than out-of-doors."

"Yes, monseigneur, when there are no enemies in the fortress. But who can tell" —

He had no time to finish. The young gentlemen had cleared a space of about a hundred yards with lightning speed. Quélus and Maugiron, who had followed the wall, threw themselves between the door and those who wanted to enter, so as to cut off their retreat, while Schomberg, D'O, and D'Épernon made ready to attack them in front.

"Death! Death!" cried Quélus, always the most violent of the five.

Suddenly the person who had been called "monseigneur" and asked whether he would preserve his incognito turned to Quélus, advanced a step, and, folding his arms arrogantly:

"I think you said, 'Death!' while addressing a son of France, M. de Quélus," said he, in sombre tones and with sinister eyes.

Quélus recoiled, trembling and thunderstruck, his knees bending under him, his eyes haggard.

"Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou!" he exclaimed.

"Monseigneur the Duc d'Anjou!" repeated the others.

"Well, gentlemen," retorted François, with a menacing air. "do you still cry: 'Death! Death!'"

"Monseigneur," stammered D'Épernon, "it was a jest; pardon us."

"Monseigneur," said D'O, in turn, "we could not suspect we should meet your Highness at the end of Paris and in such an out-of-the-way quarter as this."

"A jest," replied François, not even deigning to answer D'O; "you have a singular fashion of jesting, M. d'Épernon. Well, I am curious. Since I was not intended to be your target, at whom was your jest aimed?"

"Monseigneur," said Schomberg, respectfully, "we saw Saint-Luc quit the Hôtel de Montmorency and proceed in this direction. That struck us as queer, so we wanted to find out why a husband left his wife on their first wedding-night."

The excuse was plausible, for, in all probability, the Duc d'Anjou would learn the next day that Saint-Luc had not slept at the Hôtel de Montmorency, and this piece of news would coincide with what Schomberg had just said.

"M. de Saint-Luc? You took me for M. de Saint-Luc?"

"Yes, monseigneur," repeated the five companions, in chorus.

"And how long is it since you have been in the habit of mistaking M. de Saint-Luc for me? He is a head taller than I."

"It is true, monseigneur," said Quélus; "but he is exactly the height of M. d'Aurilly, who has the honor of attending you."

"And, besides, the night is very dark, monseigneur," said Maugiron.

"And, seeing a man put a key in a lock, we took him for the principal," murmured D'O.

"Finally," continued Quélus, "monseigneur cannot suppose we had the shadow of an evil intention in his regard, not even of interfering with his pleasures."

While speaking thus and apparently attending to the answers, more or less logical, which the fear and astonishment of the five companions permitted them to make, François, by a skilful strategic manoeuvre, had left the threshold of the door, and, followed step by step by Aurilly, his lute-player and ordinary companion during his nocturnal rambles, had already moved so far from the door that it could not be distinguished from the others on either side of it.

"My pleasures!" said he, sourly; "and what makes you think I am taking my pleasure here?"

"Ah, monseigneur, in any case, and no matter what you have come for, pardon us," answered Quélus. "and let us retire."

"Very well; good-by, gentlemen."

"Monseigneur," added D'Épernon, "our well-known discretion will be an assurance to your Highness that" —

The Duc d'Anjou, who was about to withdraw, stopped, and, frowning,

"Your discretion, M. de Nogaret? and who, pray, asks you for your discretion?"

"Monseigneur, we believed that your Highness, alone at this hour and followed by your confidant" —

"You are mistaken. This is what must be believed and what I wish to be believed."

The five gentlemen listened in the deepest and most respectful silence.

"I was going," he resumed, in a slow voice and as if he desired to engrave every one of his words on the memory of his hearers, "I was going to consult the Jew Manasses, who knows how to read the future in a glass and in coffee-grounds. He lives, as you are aware, in the Rue de la Tournelle. On the way, Aurilly perceived you and took you for some archers of the watch making their rounds. And so," he added, with a sort of gayety that was appalling to those who knew the prince's character, "like the genuine consultants of sorcerers that we are, we glided along the walls and slipped into doorways to hide ourselves, if it were possible, from your terrible eyes."

While thus speaking the prince had gradually reached the Rue Saint-Paul and had come to a spot from which he could be heard by the sentries of the Bastille in case of an attack, for knowing his brother's secret and inveterate hatred against him, he was not at all reassured by the respectful apologies of Henri III.'s minions.

"And now that you know what you must believe, and particularly what you must say, adieu, gentlemen. It is needless to warn you that I do not wish to be followed."

All bowed and took their leave of the prince, who turned round several times to follow them with his eye, while taking some steps in the opposite direction.

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, "I would swear that the people we have just encountered had bad intentions. It is now midnight; we are, as they said, in an out-of-the-way quarter; let us get back immediately to the hôtel, monseigneur; do let us return!"

"No," said the prince, stopping; "let us profit by their departure, on the contrary."

"Your Royal Highness is mistaken," said Aurilly; "they have not departed at all; they have simply come together again, as your Highness can see for yourself, in the retreat

where they were hidden. Do you not see them, monseigneur, in that nook yonder, in the angle of the Hôtel des Tournelles?"

François looked. Aurilly told only the exact truth. The five gentlemen had, in fact, resumed their position, and it was clear they were discussing a plan interrupted by the prince's arrival; perhaps they had even posted themselves in this position to spy on the prince and his companion and find out if they were really going to the Jew Manasses.

"Well, now, monseigneur," asked Aurilly, "what do you intend doing? I will do whatever your Highness orders: but I do not consider it prudent to remain."

"God's death!" said the prince, "yet it is annoying to have to give up the game."

"I know that well, monseigneur, but the game can be adjourned. I have already had the honor of informing your Highness that the house is hired for a year: we know the lady lodges on the first story; we have gained her maid, and have a key that opens her door. With all these advantages, we can wait."

"You are sure the door yielded?"

"Quite sure; it yielded to the third key I tried."

"By the way, did you shut it again?"

"The door?"

"Yes."

"Undoubtedly, monseigneur."

Notwithstanding the assured tone wherewith Aurilly uttered his answer, we are bound to say he was not at all so certain he had shut the door as that he had opened it. However, his composure left no more room for doubt in the prince's mind in the one case than in the other.

"But," said the prince, "I should not have been sorry to have learned" —

"What they are doing yonder, monseigneur. I can tell you with absolute certainty. They are lying in wait for some one. Your Highness has enemies; who knows what they might not dare against you?"

"Well, I consent to go, but I shall return."

"Not to-night, at least, monseigneur. Your Highness must appreciate my anxiety. I see ambushes everywhere, and, certainly, it is natural to feel such terror when I am attending on the first prince of the blood — the heir of the crown whom so many have an interest in depriving of his inheritance."

These last words made such an impression on François that he decided to return immediately; but he did not do so without bitterly cursing this unlucky encounter and promising, in his own mind, to pay off these same gentlemen, whenever he conveniently could, for the discomfort they had caused him.

"Agreed!" said he; "let us return to the hôtel; we are safe to find Bussy there, who must have got back from that infernal wedding. He is sure to have some nice quarrel on his hands, and has killed, or will kill to-morrow morning, some minion or other. That will console me."

"Yes, monseigneur," said Aurilly, "let us return and place our reliance in Bussy. I do not ask better, and, like your Highness, I have the greatest confidence in him in an affair like that."

And they started.

Scarcely had they turned the corner of the Rue de Jouy when our five companions saw a horseman, wrapped in a long cloak, appear at the end of the Rue Tison. His horse's steps resounded harshly and firmly on the frozen ground, and the white plume in his cap was turned to silver by the feeble moonbeams, which were making a last effort to pierce the cloudy sky and the snow-laden atmosphere. He kept a tight and wary hand over his steed, which, notwithstanding the cold, frothed at the mouth, impatient at the slow gait to which it was constrained.

"This time," said Quélus, "we're sure! It is he!"

"Impossible!" returned Maugiron.

"Why, pray?"

"Because he is alone, and we left him with Livarot, D'Entragues, and Ribeirac. They would not have let him run such a risk."

"It is he, notwithstanding: it is he," said D'Épernon.

"Don't you recognize his sonorous 'hum!' and his insolent way of carrying his head? He is alone, beyond a doubt."

"Then," said D'O, "it's a trap."

"In any case, trap or no trap," said Schomberg, "it is he; and as it is he: *To arms! To arms!*"

It was, indeed, Bussy, who was coming carelessly down the Rue Saint-Antoine, and who had punctually followed the route traced out for him by Quélus. He had, as we have seen, been warned by Saint-Luc, and, in spite of the very natural emotion created by the latter's words, he had dismissed his three friends at the gate of the Hôtel de Montmorency.

This was just one of those bravadoes of which our valorous colonel was so fond. He once said of himself: "I am but a simple gentleman; yet I have the heart of an emperor within my breast, and when I read in the *Lives of Plutarch* the exploits of the ancient Romans, I feel there is not, in my opinion, a single hero of antiquity whom I cannot imitate in everything he has done."

And, moreover, Bussy had thought that, perhaps, Saint-Luc, whom he did not usually reckon among his friends — and, in fact, he owed the unexpected interest of Saint-Luc in his fortunes to the perplexed position in which the latter was placed — might have given his warning only for the purpose of egging him on to take precautions that would make him the laughing-stock of his enemies, if enemies he had to encounter. Now, Bussy feared ridicule worse than danger. In the eyes of his enemies themselves he had a reputation for courage which could only be upheld on the lofty level it had reached by the maddest adventures. Like a hero out of *Plutarch*, then, he had sent away his three companions, a doughty escort that would have secured to him the respect of a squadron even, and, all alone, his arms folded under his cloak, without other weapons than his sword and dagger, he rode on to a house where awaited him, not a mistress, as might have been conjectured, but a letter sent him every month, and on the same day, by the Queen of Navarre, in memory of their former affection for each other. So, in fulfilment of a promise he had given his beautiful Marguerite, a promise never broken, he was going for it during the night, unattended, that no one might be compromised.

He had crossed safely the passage from the Rue des Grands-Augustins to the Rue Saint-Antoine, when, on arriving at the top of the Rue Saint-Catherine, his keen, practised eye discerned by the wall in the darkness those human forms which the Duc d'Anjou, not so well informed, was unable to perceive. Besides, a heart truly brave feels at the approach of a known peril a sort of exaltation which sharpens the senses and the intellect to the highest degree.

Bussy counted the number of the black shadows on the gray wall.

"Three, four, five," said he, "without reckoning the lackeys, who no doubt are stationed in another corner, and will dash out at the first cry of their masters. They think highly of

me, it would seem. Still, the devil's in it, or this is a nice job for a single man! Well, one thing is certain: honest Saint-Lue has not deceived me, and though he were the first to make a hole in my stomach during the scrimmage, I would say to him, 'Thanks for your warning, my friend.'

So saying, he continued to advance: only his right arm moved freely under his cloak, the clasp of which his left hand, without apparent movement, had unfastened.

It was then that Schomberg shouted: "To arms!" and the cry being repeated by his four comrades, all the gentlemen together rushed on Bussy.

"Ha, gentlemen," said Bussy, in his sharp, quiet voice, "so we would like to kill this poor Bussy? So he is the wild beast, the famous wild boar, we reckoned on hunting, eh? Well, gentlemen, the boar is going to rip up some of you, you may take my word for it; I think you know I am not in the habit of breaking my word."

"We know it," said Schomberg. "But, for all that, none but a very ill-bred person, Seigneur Bussy d'Amboise, would speak to us on horseback when we ourselves are listening to him on foot."

And with that, the young man's arm, covered with white satin, shot out from his cloak, glistening like silver in the moonlight. Bussy could not guess his antagonist's intention, except that it must have been a threatening one, to correspond with the gesture.

And so Bussy was about to answer it in his usual manner, when, just as he was going to plunge the rowels into his horse's flanks, he felt the animal sinking under him. Schomberg, with an adroitness peculiar to him, and already exhibited in the numerous combats in which he had been engaged, young as he was, had hurled a sort of entlass, whose broad blade was heavier than the handle, and the weapon, after hamstringing the horse, remained in the wound, driven in like a chopper into an oak-branch.

The animal gave an agonizing neigh and fell to the ground.

Bussy, always ready for everything, was on the earth in a flash, sword in hand.

"Ah, you scoundrel!" he cried, "it was my favorite steed; you shall pay me for it."

And as Schomberg approached, hurried along by his courage, and miscalculating the reach of the sword which Bussy held

close to his body, as one might miscalculate the reach of the fangs of a coiled snake, Bussy's arm and sword suddenly sprang forth and wounded him in the thigh.

Schomberg uttered a cry.

"Ha!" said Bussy, "am I a man of my word? One ripped up already. It was Bussy's wrist, not his horse's leg, you ought to have cut, you bungler."

In the twinkling of an eye, while Schomberg was binding his thigh with his handkerchief, Bussy had presented the point of his long blade, now at the face, now at the breast of each of his four other assailants, disdaining to call for aid, that is to say, to recognize he had need of aid. Wrapping his cloak about his left arm and using it as a buckler, he retreated, not to fly, but to gain a wall which he could lean against, so as not to be taken in the rear, — making ten thrusts every minute and feeling sometimes that soft resistance of the flesh which showed that his thrusts had told. Once he slipped and looked instinctively at the ground. It was enough. That instant, Quélus wounded him in the side.

"Touched!" cried Quélus.

"Yes, on the doublet," answered Bussy, who would not even acknowledge the hurt, "the sort of touch that proves the touchers are afraid."

And bounding on Quélus, he engaged him with such vigor that the young man's sword flew ten paces away from his hand. But he could not follow up his victory, for, at that moment, D'O, D'Épernon, and Mangiron attacked him with renewed fury. Schomberg had bandaged his wound, Quélus had picked up his sword. Bussy saw he was going to be surrounded, that he had but a minute to reach the wall, and that, if he did not profit by it, he was lost.

Bussy made a leap backward that put three paces between himself and his assailants; but four swords were at his breast in an instant. And yet it was not too late: with another leap, he had his back against the wall. There he halted, strong as Achilles or as Roland, and smiling at the hail of strokes that beat on his head like a tempest and clashed around him.

Suddenly he felt the perspiration on his forehead, and a cloud passed over his eyes.

He had forgotten his wound, and the symptoms of fainting he now experienced recalled it to him.

"Ah! you are growing weak," cried Quélus, renewing his blows.

"Wait," said Bussy, "here is the proof of it!"

And with the pommel of his sword he struck him on the temple. Quélus sank under the blow.

Then, furious, frenzied as the boar which, after holding the pack at bay, suddenly bounds amongst them, he uttered a terrible cry and rushed forward. D'O and D'Épernon recoiled; Maugiron had raised up Quélus and was holding him in his arms. Bussy broke the sword of Maugiron with his foot and slashed the fore-arm of Épernon. For an instant he was the victor; but Quélus came to himself, Schomberg, though wounded, returned to the lists, and again four swords blazed before his eyes. He gathered all his strength for another retreat, and drew back, step by step, to regain the wall a second time. Already the icy perspiration on his forehead, the hollow ringing in his ears, the painful bloody film that was clouding his eyes, told him that his strength was giving way. The sword no longer followed the line traced out for it by the dimmed intellect. Bussy sought for the wall with his left hand, found it, and its cold feel did him some good; but, to his amazement, the wall yielded. It was a half-open door.

Then Bussy recovered hope, and summoned up all his strength for this supreme moment. For a second his strokes were so quick and violent that all these swords were drawn back or were lowered before him. Then he slipped on the other side of the door, and, turning round, closed it with a violent push of the shoulder. The spring clicked in the lock. It was over. Bussy was out of danger, Bussy was the victor, for Bussy was safe.

Then, with eyes wild with joy, he saw through the narrow grating the pale faces of his foes, heard the furious sword-thrusts at the door, the cries of rage, the mad imprecations. At length, it suddenly seemed to him as if the earth were giving way under his feet, as if the wall were shaking. He advanced three steps and found himself in a court, tottered and fell on the steps of a staircase.

Then he felt nothing more, and it looked to him as if he were descending into the silence and obscurity of the tomb.

CHAPTER III.

HOW IT IS SOMETIMES HARD TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN
A DREAM AND THE REALITY.

BEFORE he fell, Bussy had had time to pass his handkerchief under his shirt and buckle his sword-belt over it ; this formed a sort of bandage for the raw, burning wound, from which the blood escaped like a jet of flame. But he had already lost enough blood before this to bring about the fainting-fit to which he had succumbed.

However, whether that in a brain over-excited by anger and pain life still held its ground under an appearance of insensibility, or that the swoon had been succeeded by a fever, and this fever had been again succeeded by a swoon, this is what Bussy saw, or thought he saw, during an hour of dream or reality, during a moment of twilight between the shadow of two nights.

He found himself in a chamber furnished with carved wooden furniture, a painted ceiling and tapestry on which numerous figures were embroidered. These individuals were worked in every possible attitude, holding flowers, carrying weapons, and seemed to be making violent efforts to get away from the walls and climb to the ceiling by mysterious paths. Between the two windows stood a woman's portrait, brilliantly lit up. Only it seemed to Bussy that the frame of this picture was exactly like the frame of a door. Bussy, nailed to his bed, apparently by some higher power, deprived of the faculty of moving, with all his senses in abeyance except that of sight, gazed with lack-lustre eyes on all these personages, on the insipid smiles of those who carried flowers and on the comical anger of those who carried swords. Had he seen them before, or was this the first time he had noticed them ? His head was too heavy to have any definite idea on the matter.

In a moment the woman in the picture seemed to move out of the frame, and an adorable being, clad in a flowing robe of white wool, such as angels wear, with fair hair falling over her shoulders, eyes black as jet, long, velvety eyelashes, a skin under which you could almost see the crimson current that tinted the rosy cheeks, advanced toward him. This woman was so marvellously beautiful, her outstretched arms were so

ravishing, that Bussy made an effort to rise and throw himself at her feet. But it looked to him as if he were held down by bands like those wherewith the corpse is held down in its tomb, while, disdaining earth, the immaterial soul ascends the skies.

This impression forced him to take note of the bed upon which he was lying: it was apparently one of those magnificent carved couches of the days of François I., hung with white damask embroidered in gold.

At sight of this woman the personages on the wall and ceiling ceased to occupy Bussy's attention, which was entirely devoted to the woman of the picture. He tried to make out if she had left a vacancy in the frame. But a cloud his eyes could not pierce floated before this frame and hid it from view. Then he turned his eyes back to the mysterious apparition and, fixing his gaze on the wonderful woman, he set about composing a compliment to her in verse, as he was in the habit of doing, in such cases, every day.

But suddenly the woman disappeared; an opaque body came between her and Bussy; this body moved clumsily and stretched out its arms as if it were playing blind-man's buff.

Bussy's gorge rose at this conduct, and he flew into such a rage that, if his limbs had been free, he would have flung himself on the importunate visitor; it is but just to say that he tried, but the thing was impossible.

As he was vainly attempting to get out of the bed, to which he seemed chained, the newcomer spoke.

"Well," he said, "is this the end of my journey?"

"Yes, maître," answered a voice the sweetness of which thrilled every fibre in Bussy's heart, "and you can now take off your bandage."

Bussy made an effort to find out if the sweet-voiced woman was actually the woman of the portrait; but the attempt was useless. All he saw before him was the pleasing features of a graceful young man, who, in obedience to the invitation just given him, had taken off the bandage, and who was going round the apartment with a look of bewilderment.

"Devil take the fellow!" thought Bussy.

And he tried to express his thought by word or gesture, but it was impossible for him to do either.

"Ah! now I understand," said the young man, approaching

the bed, "you are wounded, my dear monsieur, are you not? Do not be uneasy, we will try to cure you."

Bussy wanted to reply, but understood this was out of the question. His eyes swam in an icy moisture, and he felt in his fingers the prickings as it were of a thousand pins.

"Is the wound mortal?" asked the sweet voice which had already spoken, — the voice of the lady of the picture, — in a tone of such heartfelt and pained interest that the tears came to Bussy's eyes.

"Upon my word, I cannot say as yet," answered the young man; "but see, he has fainted!"

It was all Bussy could comprehend. He thought he heard the rustling of a robe moving away. Next, it seemed to him as if he felt a red-hot iron in his side, and all that was still alive in him vanished into darkness.

Later on, Bussy found it impossible to fix the duration of this fainting-fit.

But, when he returned to consciousness, a cold wind was blowing over his face; hoarse and discordant voices were grating on his ears; he opened his eyes to see if it were the people of the tapestry who were quarrelling with the people on the ceiling; and, in hopes that the portrait was still there, he turned his head in all directions, but there was no tapestry, nor ceiling, either; and, as for the portrait, it was gone completely. All Bussy could perceive on his right was a man in a gray coat and apron, which was tucked up and stained with blood; on his left a monk of St. Genevieve, who was holding up his head; and, in front of him, an old woman mumbling prayers.

The wandering eyes of Bussy soon fastened on a pile of stones, also in front of him, and, looking upward, to measure the height, he thereupon recognized the Temple, flanked with its walls and towers; above the Temple, the cold, white sky, slightly tinted by the rising sun.

Bussy was purely and simply in the street, or rather on the border of a ditch, and the ditch was that of the Temple.

"Ah, thanks, my worthy friends, for the trouble you must have taken in bringing me hither. I had need of air, but it would have been easy to have given me all I wanted of it by opening the windows, and I should have felt more comfortable on my bed of white damask and gold than on this bare ground. No matter. You will find in my pouch, unless you have already



"YOU ARE WOUNDED, MY DEAR MONSIEUR, ARE YOU NOT?"

paid yourselves, which would have been only prudent, a score of gold crowns or so; take them, my friends, take them."

"But, my good gentleman," said the butcher, "we have not been put to the trouble of bringing you here. Here you were, sure enough, beyond a yea or a nay. And here we came on you at daybreak, as we were passing."

"The devil! You don't say so!" returned Bussy. "And was the young doctor here, too?"

The bystanders looked at one another.

"He is still a little delirious," said the monk, shaking his head. Then, returning to Bussy,

"My son," said he, "I think you would do well to make your confession."

Bussy looked at the monk with a bewildered air.

"There was no doctor, poor dear young man," said the old woman. "There you were, alone and deserted, as cold as death. There is a little snow, and you can see your place is traced out in black on the ground."

Bussy cast a look on his aching side, remembered he had been wounded, slipped his hand under his doublet, and felt his handkerchief over the same spot, firmly kept in place by the sword-belt.

"It's queer," said he.

His new friends, profiting by the permission he had given them, were already dividing his purse, to the accompaniment of many an expression of sorrow for his condition.

"Everything is all right now, my friends," said he, when the division was made; "now conduct me to my hôtel."

"Oh, surely, surely, poor dear," said the old woman; "the butcher is strong, and — then he has a horse; you could ride it."

"Is that true?" asked Bussy.

"As true as heaven's above us!" answered the butcher, "and I and my horse are at your service, my good gentleman."

"That's all very well, my son," said the monk; "but while the butcher is looking up his horse you had better confess."

"What's your name?" asked Bussy.

"My name is Brother Gorenflot," replied the monk.

"Well, Brother Gorenflot," said Bussy, sitting up, "I hope the time for confession is n't yet come. And so, as I am very cold, I am in a hurry to get to my hôtel, where I could warm myself."

"And how is your hôtel called?"

"The Hôtel de Bussy."

"What!" cried the bystanders, "the Hôtel de Bussy?"

"Yes; anything astonishing in that?"

"You belong, then, to the household of M. de Bussy?"

"I am M. de Bussy himself."

"Bussy!" shouted the crowd, "the Seigneur de Bussy! The scourge of the minions! Hurrah for Bussy!"

And the young man was seized and carried on the shoulders of his admirers to his hôtel, while the monk went away, counting his share of the twenty crowns, and, with a shake of the head, murmuring:

"So it's that rascal Bussy — I don't wonder now that he did not care to confess."

When Bussy was back again in his hôtel he summoned his surgeon, who thought the wound not serious.

"Tell me," said Bussy, "has not the wound been dressed?"

"Upon my word," said the doctor, "I cannot be positive, although, after all, it looks as if it might have been."

"And," continued Bussy, "was it serious enough to have produced delirium?"

"Certainly."

"The devil!" thought Bussy, "was that tapestry, with its figures carrying flowers and arms, all delirium? And the frescoed ceiling and the carved bed, hung with white damask and gold, and the portrait between the two windows, the adorable blonde woman with the black eyes, the doctor playing blind-man's buff, whom I should have liked to jump on, — was all that delirium? And was there nothing real except my scuffle with the minions? Where did I fight, anyway? Ah, now I remember, it was near the Bastille, opposite the Rue Saint-Paul. I planted myself against a wall, and the wall was a door, and the door gave way, luckily. I shut it with great difficulty and found myself in an alley. Then I don't remember anything until the moment I fainted. Was all the rest a dream? That is the question. Ah! and my horse, by the way? It must have been found dead at the place. Doctor, be kind enough to call some one."

The doctor called a servant.

On inquiry, Bussy learned that the poor beast had dragged itself, bleeding and mutilated, to the gateway of the hôtel, and was found there at daybreak, neighing. The alarm was

immediately spread through the household. All Bussy's servants, who worshipped their master, started to search for him, and most of them had not yet returned.

"The portrait, at least," said Bussy, "must have surely been a dream. No doubt of that. How could a portrait have moved from its frame for no other purpose than to chat with a doctor who had his eyes bandaged? I must be mad. And yet, when I recall it to mind, this portrait had ravishing eyes, had" —

Bussy made an effort to remember the characteristics of the portrait, and, as he passed in review all the details, a voluptuous thrill, that thrill of love that warms and animates the heart, shot through his inflamed breast.

"Could it have all been a dream?" cried Bussy while the doctor was dressing his wound. "*Mordieu!* it's not possible; there are no such dreams.

"Let me go over the whole business again."

And Bussy began to repeat for the hundredth time:

"I was at the ball; Saint-Luc warned me I should be attacked near the Bastille; Antraguët, Ribeirac, and Livarot were with me. I bade them good-by. I went along the quay, the Grand-Châtelet, etc., etc., etc. At the Hôtel des Tournelles, I saw that people were lying in wait for me. They made a rush on me, lamed my horse. We had a rough tussle. I entered an alley; I was taken ill — and then? Ah, it's that *and then* that gets the best of me; after that *and then*, a fever, delirium, a dream, *and then* —

"And then," he added, with a sigh, "I found myself on the slope of a ditch, one of the Temple ditches, where a monk of St. Genevieve wanted to confess me. All the same, I *will* know all about the affair," continued Bussy, after a moment's silence, which he spent in trying to recall his remembrances. "I say, doctor, shall I have to keep my room for a fortnight on account of this scratch, as I did the last time?"

"That depends. You can't walk, can you?" asked the doctor.

"You'll see if I can't. I think I have quicksilver in my legs."

"Take a few steps, then."

Bussy jumped from the bed, and proved the truth of his confident boast by walking quickly round the room.

"You'll do," said the doctor, "provided you don't ride, or walk thirty miles the first day."

"Capital!" cried Bussy, "you're the right kind of a doctor! Still, I saw another one last night. Oh, yes, I saw him, every feature of him is stamped on my mind, and should I ever meet him, I shall recognize him, you may take my word for it."

"My dear lord," said the doctor, "I should not advise you to search for him; there is always a little fever after a sword-thrust; surely you ought to know that, seeing that this is your twelfth."

"Good heavens!" cried Bussy, suddenly, struck with a new idea, for his mind was entirely full of the mysterious events of the preceding night, "what if my dream began outside the door instead of inside it? What if there was no alley, no staircase, no bed of white damask and gold, and no portrait? What if those wretches, believing me dead, carried me neatly to the ditches of the Temple in order to divert the suspicions of any chance spectator of the scene? Then, most assuredly, I must have dreamt all the rest. Saints in heaven! if these ruffians have been the means of bringing me a dream that is racking, torturing, killing me, I call God to witness that I shall disembowel every soul of them to the very last."

"My dear lord," said the doctor, "if you care to have a speedy cure you must not excite yourself in this fashion."

"Always making an exception, however, of my honest friend Saint-Luc," went on Bussy, without listening to the doctor. "He is quite a different sort of person; he has acted like a friend to me. Consequently, I must pay him my first visit."

"But not before five in the evening," said the doctor.

"As you like," answered Bussy; "but I assure you it is not going out and seeing somebody, but staying in and seeing nobody, that will retard my recovery."

"What you say is likely enough," said the doctor; "you are, in every respect, a very queer patient. Act as you wish, monseigneur. I have only one thing more to advise: do not get another sword-thrust until you are cured of this."

Bussy promised the doctor to do his best to follow his counsel; and, having dressed, he called for his litter and was carried to the Hôtel de Montmorency.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW MADAME DE SAINT-LUC SPENT HER WEDDING-NIGHT.

A HANDSOME cavalier and perfect gentleman was this Louis de Clermont, better known as Bussy d'Amboise, whom his cousin, Brantôme, has placed in the ranks of the great captains of the sixteenth century. None, for a long time before him, had made more glorious conquests. Kings and princes sought his friendship. Queens and princesses sent him their sweetest smiles. Bussy had succeeded La Mole in the affections of Marguerite of Navarre; and the good Queen, with the tender heart, needing, no doubt, to be consoled, after the death of the favorite, whose career we have described, had committed so many extravagant follies for the sake of the brave and comely Bussy that her husband, Henri, who did not usually bother his head about that sort of things, was ruffled, while François d'Anjou would never have forgiven the love of his sister for Bussy, but that her love for Bussy had gained him over to his interests. Here again the prince sacrificed his enmity to that secret and wavering ambition which was fated to bring him so many troubles and so little real fruit.

But, amid all his successes in war, gallantry, and ambition, Bussy's soul was unmoved by any human weakness, and the man who had never known fear had never, until the period we have reached, known love, either. The emperor's heart which, as he said himself, throbbed in the gentleman's breast, was pure and virginal, like unto the diamond, as yet untouched by the hand of the lapidary, when it leaves the mine where it has ripened beneath the gaze of the sun. Consequently, there was no room in Bussy's mind for ideas that would have rendered him still more like a real emperor. He believed himself worthy of a crown, and was, assuredly, worthier than the wearer of the crown he had in his mind.

Henri III. had offered him his friendship, and Bussy had refused it, saying that the friends of a king are his lackeys, and often something worse; so, such a condition by no means suited him. Henri swallowed the affront in silence, an affront rendered still more bitter when Bussy chose Duc François for his master. It is true Duc François was Bussy's master somewhat in the sense in which the lion-keeper is the master of

the lion. He serves and feeds the lion for fear the lion might eat him. Such a lion was this Bussy whom François egged on to champion his private quarrels. Bussy saw this clearly enough, but he rather liked the part of champion.

He had made for himself a line of conduct not unlike that described in the motto of the Rohans: "Cannot be king, scorn to be prince, Rohan I am." Bussy said to himself: "I cannot be King of France, but M. le Duc d'Anjou can and would be. I will be the King of M. le Duc d'Anjou."

And, in fact, he was.

When Saint-Luc's people saw the terrible Bussy coming toward the building they ran to notify M. de Brissac.

"Is M. de Saint-Luc at home?" asked Bussy, thrusting his head through the curtains as his litter entered the gateway.

"No, monsieur," answered the concierge.

"Where shall I find him?"

"I do not know, monsieur," said the dignified servitor. "Indeed, we are very anxious, for M. de Saint-Luc has not returned to the hôtel since yesterday evening."

"Oh, nonsense!" returned Bussy, astounded.

"It is as I have the honor to tell you."

"And Madame de Saint-Luc?"

"Oh, as to Madame de Saint-Luc it is another matter."

"She is in the hôtel?"

"Yes."

"Be good enough to tell her I shall be charmed if she permit me to pay her my respects."

Five minutes later the messenger returned, saying Madame de Saint-Luc would receive M. de Bussy with pleasure.

Bussy climbed down from his velvet cushions and ascended the grand staircase. When the young man entered the reception-room, Jeanne de la Cossé ran to meet him. She was very pale, and her hair, dark as a raven's wing, gave that paleness the tone of ivory when it is turning yellow. Her eyes were reddened by sorrow and sleeplessness, and the silvery furrow of a recent tear could be traced on her cheek. Bussy, who at first was inclined to smile at this paleness and who was preparing a compliment to these heavy eyes adapted to the occasion, stopped improvising when he saw such signs of real grief.

"You are welcome, M. de Bussy," said the young woman, "notwithstanding the fear your presence arouses in me."

"What do you mean, madame?" asked Bussy, "and how could my presence betoken a misfortune?"

"Ah! there was a meeting between you and M. de Saint-Luc last night, was there not? Come, confess it."

"Between me and Saint-Luc?" repeated Bussy, astonished.

"Yes, he left me to speak to you. You belong to the Duc d'Anjou, he to the King; you had a quarrel. Hide nothing from me, monsieur. I beseech you. You must understand my anxiety. It is true he left with the King, but he must have returned and met you. Confess the truth. What has become of M. de Saint-Luc?"

"Madame," said Bussy, "this is really marvellous. I was expecting you to ask about my wound, and you question me about" —

"M. de Saint-Luc wounded you! He has fought, then!" cried Jeanne. "Ah, you see now" —

"No, madame, he has not fought at all, certainly not with me, and, thank God, it was not my dear friend Saint-Luc who wounded me. On the contrary, he did all he could to prevent my being wounded. Why, he must have told you we are now like Damon and Pythias!"

"He told me! Why, how could he, since I have not seen him since?"

"Have not seen him since? Then what your concierge told me is true?"

"What did he tell you?"

"That Saint-Luc has not returned since eleven o'clock yesterday evening. You have not seen your husband, you say, since eleven o'clock yesterday evening?"

"Alas! no."

"But where can he be?"

"That is what I am asking you."

"For goodness' sake, madame, relate what happened," said Bussy, who suspected what had occurred, "it must be very droll."

The poor woman looked at Bussy with the greatest astonishment.

"Oh, no," Bussy continued hastily, "what I mean is that it is very sad. I have lost a good deal of blood and am not in possession of all my faculties. Tell me, madame, your lamentable story. I am anxious to hear it."

And Jeanne related all that she knew; namely, the order

given by Henri to Saint-Luc to attend him, the closing of the Louvre gates, the answer of the guards, and the continued absence of her husband afterward.

"Ha!" said Bussy, "now I understand it all."

"What! you understand it?" exclaimed Jeanne.

"Yes; his Majesty carried Saint-Luc to the Louvre, and once inside the Louvre, he has been unable to get out."

"And why has he been unable to get out?"

"Oh!" said Bussy, much embarrassed, "you are now asking me to reveal state secrets."

"But," said the young woman, "I went to the Louvre, and my father also."

"Well?"

"Well, the guards answered they did not know what we meant, and that M. de Saint-Luc must have returned home."

"It is only surer than ever M. de Saint-Luc is in the Louvre," said Bussy.

"You think so?"

"Most certainly, and, if you wish, you can be equally certain on your side."

"How?"

"By seeing for yourself."

"Is that possible, then?"

"Certainly."

"But it is useless for me to go to the palace. I should be sent away with the same words I heard before. For, if he is there, why should I be prevented from seeing him?"

"Would you like to enter the Louvre?"

"For what purpose?"

"To see Saint-Luc."

"But if he is not there?"

"Why, *mordieu*! I tell you he is there; I'm sure of it."

"That is strange!"

"No, it's royal."

"So, then, you can enter the Louvre?"

"Certainly. I am not Saint-Luc's wife."

"You confound me."

"Even so. Come!"

"But what is your meaning? You claim the wife of Saint-Luc cannot enter the Louvre, and yet you want to bring me to it along with you!"

"Not at all, madame; it is not Saint-Luc's wife I want to bring with me — A woman! You make me blush!"

"Then you are laughing at me, and, considering my distress, you are very cruel."

"Ah, no! dear lady. Just listen to me: You are twenty, your eyes are black, you are tall and slim, you resemble my youngest page; you understand? — the pretty lad who looked so well in his cloth of gold costume, yesterday evening?"

"Oh, what nonsense, M. de Bussy!" cried Jeanne, blushing.

"But listen. I have no other means than the one I proposed. Take it or leave it. Do you want to see Saint-Luc or do you not?"

"Oh, I would give the world to see him!"

"Well, then, I promise that you'll see him without giving anything."

"Yes — but" —

"Oh, I have told you the only way."

"Then, M. de Bussy, I will do what you propose; you tell the boy I want one of his dresses, and I shall send one of my women for it."

"No, I have nine new ones at home I had made for those scamps for the Queen-mother's next ball. I'll select the one I think best suited to your figure and send it; then you will meet me at a place agreed on; let it be, if you like, at the corner of the Rue des Provins in the Rue Saint-Honoré; from there" —

"From there?"

"Well, from there we'll go to the Louvre together."

Jeanne burst out laughing and held out her hand to Bussy.

"Forgive me my suspicions," said she.

"With all my heart. You will gratify me with an adventure that will make all Europe laugh. I am the obliged party."

And, taking leave of the young woman, he returned home to make his preparations for the masquerade.

That night, at the appointed hour, Bussy and Madame de Saint-Luc met at the top of the Barrière des Sergents. If the young woman had not worn his page's costume, Bussy would not have recognized her. She was adorable in her disguise. Both, after exchanging a few words, proceeded to the Louvre.

At the end of the Rue des Fosses Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois they met a large party. This party filled the entire street and barred their passage.

Jeanne was frightened. Bussy recognized by the torches the Duc d'Anjou's arquebusiers, and the prince himself could be recognized anywhere by the piebald horse he always rode and the white velvet cloak he usually wore.

"Ah," said Bussy, turning to Jeanne, "so you were puzzled, my fair page, to know how you were to enter the Louvre! You may rest easy now; you shall enter it in triumph."

"Ho, monseigneur!" shouted Bussy, with all the power of his lungs, to the Duc d'Anjou.

The call penetrated the air, and, despite the tramping of horses and the hum of voices, reached the prince, who turned round.

"What! Bussy?" he cried, delighted. "I was afraid they had killed you, and was going to your house in the Rue de Grenelle."

"Faith, monseigneur," said Bussy, without even thanking the prince for this mark of attention. "if I am not dead, it is nobody's fault except my own. In good truth, monseigneur, you get me into pleasant situations, nice pitfalls, and then leave me there. Yesterday night, after that ball of Saint-Luc, I got among regular cut-throats. There was not another Angevin with me, and I give you my word of honor they have drained every drop of blood in my body."

"God's death, Bussy, they'll pay for the blood you lost with every drop of their own!"

"Yes, you say that," said Bussy, with his usual freedom, "and you'll have a smile for the first of them you meet. If only you showed your teeth when you smiled; but you keep your lips too tight for that."

"Well," returned the prince, "follow me to the Louvre and you shall see."

"Stay, monseigneur. I am not going to the Louvre if it is to receive any insults. That may do very well for princes of the blood and for minions, not for me."

"Rest easy, I have taken the matter to heart."

"Do you promise that the reparation will be ample?"

"I promise you'll have satisfaction. You are still hesitating, it seems?"

"Monseigneur, I know you so well."

"Come, I tell you: we'll talk the matter over."

"Nothing could be better for your business than this,"

whispered Bussy in the countess' ear : " there will be a scandalous quarrel between these good brothers, who detest each other, and, during the scene, you will easily find Saint-Luc."

" Well, now," said the prince, " have you decided, or do you require me to pledge you my honor as a prince ? "

" Oh, no," answered Bussy, " that would only bring me misfortune. Well, after all, I belong to you, and, come what may, I know how, if insulted, to avenge myself."

And Bussy joined the prince, and his new page, following his master as closely as possible, kept immediately behind him.

" Avenge yourself ? No, no," said the prince, in reply to this threat of Bussy. " That shall be my concern, my brave gentleman. I take the office of avenging you on myself. Listen," he added in a low voice, " I know your assassins."

" Bah ! " retorted Bussy, " your Highness is n't likely to have taken the trouble of making inquiries."

" What is more, I saw them."

" Saw them ? " said Bussy, astonished.

" At a spot where I had some affair on hand myself — at the Porte Saint-Antoine ; they met me and were near killing me in your place. Ah ! I never imagined it was for you they were lying in wait, the brigands ! But for that " —

" Well, but for that ? "

" Had you your new page with you ? " asked the prince, breaking off in his threat.

" No, monseigneur, I was alone. And you, monseigneur ? " said Bussy.

" I was with Aurilly ; and why were you alone ? "

" Because having got the name of the ' brave Bussy ' I want to keep it."

" And they wounded you ? " asked the prince, with his usual quickness in responding by a feint to a thrust aimed at him.

" Listen," said Bussy. " I do not wish to give them the joy of knowing it, but I have a neat little gash in my side."

" Ah, the wretches ! " cried the prince. " Aurilly was right enough when he said they had evil designs."

" What ! " said Bussy, " you saw the ambush ? You were with Aurilly, who plays with the sword almost as well as he does with the lute ! He told your Highness these men had bad designs, and you were two, and they were only five, and yet you never thought of staying and coming to my help ! "

"But what was to be done? How was I to know the ambush was intended for you?"

"*Mort diable!* as Charles IX. used to say. When you recognized King Henri's friends, you must surely have had some idea that they were on the look-out for some of your friends. Now, as there are few people except myself who have the courage to be your friends, it ought not to have been difficult for you to guess that I was their object."

"Yes, perhaps you're right, my dear Bussy," said François; "but I never thought of all that."

"Of a piece with the rest!" sighed Bussy, as if in these words he found all that was necessary to express what he thought of his master.

They arrived at the Louvre. The Duc d'Anjou was received by the captain and gate-keepers at the wicket. The orders regulating the entrance were of the strictest; but it may be easily imagined these orders did not affect the next man in the realm to the King. The prince, then, was soon lost in the archway of the drawbridge with all his suite.

"Monseigneur," said Bussy, when they had reached the court of honor, "you can now have it out with the King, and remember the solemn promise you made me. I have to go to speak to a person."

"You're not leaving me, Bussy?" asked the prince, uneasily, for he had counted somewhat on the presence of this gentleman.

"I must, but do not let that trouble you. Rest assured that if I hear the slightest noise I shall be back. Shout, monseigneur, shout, *mordieu!* shout so that I may hear you. If I don't hear you shouting, depend upon it I shall not return."

Then, profiting by the entrance of the prince into the grand hall, he slipped away, followed by Jeanne, into the other apartments.

Bussy knew the Louvre as well as his own hôtel. After going up a private staircase and passing through two or three lonely corridors he reached a sort of antechamber.

"Wait for me here," said he to Jeanne.

"Good heavens! you're not going to leave me by myself?" exclaimed the young woman in terror.

"It can't be helped; I must prepare the way for your entrance."

CHAPTER V.

HOW MADAME DE SAINT-LUC SPENT HER SECOND WEDDING-NIGHT DIFFERENTLY FROM HER FIRST.

Bussy went straight to the armory of which Charles IX. used to be so fond. By a new arrangement it had been turned into a sleeping-room for Henri III., who had furnished it to suit his own fancy. Charles IX., the hunter-King, the blacksmith-King, the poet-King, had filled this chamber with weapons, arquebuses, horns, manuscript, books, and griping-presses. Henri III. had furnished it with two beds in velvet and satin, licentious pictures, relics, scapularies blessed by the Pope, perfumed sachets from the East, and a collection of the finest fencing-swords that could be discovered.

Bussy knew well Henri could not be in this chamber, as his brother had asked for an audience in the gallery, but he knew also that, next to the King's bedroom, was the apartment of Charles IX.'s nurse, which had become that of Henri III.'s favorite. Now, as Henri III. was very fickle in his friendships, this apartment had been successively occupied by Saint-Mégrin, Mangiron, D'O, D'Épernon, Quélus, and Schomberg, and was; in Bussy's opinion, likely to be occupied at the present moment by Saint-Luc, for whom the King, as we have seen, experienced so great a revival of affection that he had carried the young man off from his wife.

Henri III. was a strangely organized being, at once futile and profound, timid and brave; always bored, always restless, always a dreamer, he could not exist except in a continuous state of mental distraction; in the daytime, it was noise, gaming, physical exercises, mummeries, masquerades, intrigues; at night, illuminations, gossip, prayer, or debauchery. In fact, Henri III. is almost the only personage of his character we find in the modern world. Henri III., an antique hermaphrodite, should have seen the light in some city of the Orient, amid a crowd of mutes, slaves, eunuchs, icoglans, philosophers, sophists, and his reign ought to have marked an era of effeminate debauchery and unknown follies between the times of Nero and Heliogabalus.

Now, Bussy, suspecting Saint-Luc was in the nurse's apartment, knocked at the ante-chamber common to both rooms.

The captain of the guards opened it.

"Monsieur de Bussy!" cried the astonished officer.

"Yes, it is I, my dear M. de Nancey," said Bussy. "The King wants to speak to M. de Saint-Luc."

"Very well," answered the captain, "some one inform M. de Saint-Luc that the King would speak with him."

Bussy flashed a glance at the page through the half-open door. Then, turning to M. de Nancey:

"But pray, what is my poor Saint-Luc doing at present?" asked Bussy.

"Playing with Chicot, monsieur, and waiting for the return of the King, who is holding an audience with M. le Duc d'Anjou."

"Would you be kind enough to allow my page to wait for me here?" asked Bussy of the captain of the guards.

"With great pleasure."

"Come in, Jean," said Bussy to the young woman, and he pointed to the recess of a window, whither she went at once.

She had hardly taken her place there when Saint-Luc entered. M. de Nancey retired to a distance.

"What does the King want with me?" said Saint-Luc, looking sour and morose. "Ah, it is you, M. de Bussy?"

"Myself and no other, my dear Saint-Luc, and first of all" — He lowered his voice.

"— first of all, let me thank you for the service your rendered me."

"Oh, that was quite natural," said Saint-Luc; "it went against my grain to look on while a gallant gentleman like you was being assassinated. I was afraid you were killed."

"I was within an inch of it, but, in such a case, an inch is as good as a mile."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I got out of the trouble with a neat little sword-thrust, which I have repaid with interest, I think, to D'Épernon and Schomberg. As for Quélus, he ought to bless the thickness of his skull. It is one of the hardest I ever encountered."

"Tell me all about it: it will distract me," said Saint-Luc, yawning as if he would dislocate his jaws.

"I have n't time at present, my dear Saint-Luc. Besides, I came for quite a different object. You are rather bored here, I fancy."

"Royally bored; that tells everything."

"Well, I have come to put a little life in you. What the devil! one good turn deserves another."

"You are right, and you are doing me as great a service, at least, as I have done you. Ennui is just as deadly as a sword-thrust; it takes longer to finish you, but it's surer."

"Poor Count!" said Bussy, "you are a prisoner, then, as I suspected?"

"The closest prisoner in the kingdom. The King pretends that no one amuses him as I do. The King is really very kind, for since yesterday I have made more grimaces at him than his monkey, and told him more unmannerly truths than his jester."

"Well, now, let us think a little; is there nothing I can do for you? You know I have just offered you my services."

"Certainly there is," said Saint-Luc; "you might go to my house, or rather De Brissac's, and reassure my poor wife, who must be very uneasy and must undoubtedly regard my conduct as strange as it well could be."

"What shall I tell her?"

"Oh, *pardieu!* tell her what you have seen; tell her I'm a prisoner, a prisoner confined to the guard-room; tell her that ever since yesterday the King has been talking to me of friendship like Cicero, who wrote on it, and of virtue like Socrates, who practised it."

"And how do you answer him?" asked Bussy, laughing.

"*Morbleu!* I tell him that, as far as regards friendship, I am a bear, and, as far as regards virtue, I am a blackguard. All which doesn't hinder him from repeating, ever and anon, with a sigh: 'Ah! Saint-Luc, is friendship, then but a chimera? Ah! Saint-Luc, is virtue, then, but a name?' Only, after saying it in French, he says it again in Latin, and over again in Greek."

At this sally, the page, to whom Saint-Luc had so far not paid the slightest attention, burst out laughing.

"But what can you expect, my dear friend? He hopes to touch your heart. *Bis repetita placent*: with the greater reason, *ter*. But is this all I can do for you?"

"Yes, it is, egad! or, at least, I'm afraid it is."

"Then, it has been done already."

"Done already? How?"

"I suspected what happened, and told your wife, the first thing."

“And what was her answer?”

“She would not believe me. But,” added Bussy, glancing at the window recess, “I expect she will, at last, be convinced by the actual evidence. Ask me, then, something else, something difficult, impossible even; that is, the sort of thing I should like to accomplish.”

“Then, dear Bussy, borrow for the nonce the gentle Knight Astolfo’s hippogriff, and on its back fly to one of my windows; then will I mount behind you and you shall waft me away to my wife. You shall be at perfect liberty, if your mind that way incline, to continue your journey to the moon afterward.”

“My dear, I can do something far easier, I can bring the hippogriff to your wife and have your wife come and find you.”

“Here?”

“Yes, here.”

“In the Louvre?”

“In the Louvre even. Would not that be still more amusing?”

“*Mordieu!* I should think so!”

“You would not feel bored any longer?”

“You may bet your life on it, I should n’t.”

“For you have been bored, you told me?”

“You ask Chicot. I have a horror of him, and proposed to exchange a few sword-thrusts with him. The rascal got so angry that it was enough to make one die with laughing. And yet, I did not move an eyebrow, I give you my word for it. But if this thing last, I shall kill him outright, to provide myself with some sort of recreation, or else get him to kill me.”

“Plague take it man, don’t play that game! You know Chicot is no bungler with his tools. You would be a confounded sight more bored in your coffin than you are in your prison, depend upon it.”

“Faith, I don’t know about that.”

“I say!” laughed Bussy, “what if I were to give my page to you?”

“To me?”

“Yes; he’s a wonderful lad.”

“Thanks,” said Saint-Lue, “pages are my abomination. The King offered to send for my favorite one, and I declined his offer. You can give him to the King, who is rearranging his household. With me it’s different: as soon as I leave here, I

intend doing as they did at Chenoneeaux at the time of the open-air festival — I'll have none but women among my attendants, and, what's more, I'll design their costumes."

"Pshaw!" persisted Bussy; "can't you give him a trial?"

"Bussy," said Saint-Luc, annoyed, "this is no time for bantering me."

"You won't let me persuade you?"

"No, I say!"

"When I tell you I know what you want?"

"No, no, no, no, no a hundred times!"

"Ho there! come hither, page."

"*Mordieu!*" shouted Saint-Luc.

The page left the window, and came, blushing like a peony.

"Good heavens!" gasped Saint-Luc, astounded at discovering Jeanne in Bussy's livery.

"Now," asked Bussy, "shall I send him away?"

"No, no, *vrai Dieu*, no!" cried Saint-Luc. "Ah, Bussy, Bussy, the friendship I owe you shall be eternal!"

"Take care, Saint-Luc; though they can't hear you they can see you."

"You're right," said the latter, and, after advancing two steps to meet his wife, he took three steps backward. It was just as well he did so. M. de Nancey, astonished at the pantomime enacted before his eyes, was beginning to pay attention to the too expressive gestures of Saint-Luc, when a great noise, coming from the glass gallery, diverted him from his purpose.

"Ah, good heavens! the King is quarrelling with some one, if I am not greatly mistaken," cried M. de Nancey.

"I'm really afraid he is," answered Bussy, pretending to be uneasy. "I wonder is it with M. d. Anjou? you know I came with him."

The captain buckled on his sword and started for the gallery, where, in fact, there was an altercation loud enough to pierce the walls and roof.

"Say, don't you think I have managed pretty well?" said Bussy, turning to Saint-Luc.

"What is it all about?" asked the latter.

"Only the King and Anjou tearing each other to pieces, and as that must be a splendid spectacle, I must not lose any of it. You had better profit by the scrimmage, not by flight, the King would be sure to follow you; but by hiding away in

some secure place the pretty page I am giving you; is it possible to do so?"

"Yes, *pardieu!* and if it weren't, I'd make it possible. But, luckily, I am pretending to be ill and keeping my room."

"In that case, good-by, Saint-Luc. Madame, do not forget me in your prayers."

And Bussy, delighted at having tricked Henri III., passed out of the ante-chamber and entered the gallery, where the King, red with anger, was swearing to the prince, pale with rage, that in the scene on the preceding night Bussy was the challenger.

"I assert, sire," shouted the Duc d'Anjou, "that D'Épernon, Schomberg, D'O, Maugiron, and Quélus lay in wait for him at the Hôtel des Tournelles."

"Who told you so?"

"I saw them with my own eyes, sire."

"And in the darkness, too? Why, the night was as black as pitch."

"True. And so it was not by their faces I recognized them."

"By what, then? their shoulders?"

"No, sire, by their voices."

"They spoke to you?"

"Better than that, they took me for Bussy and charged on me."

"On you?"

"Yes, on me."

"And what were you doing at the Porte Saint-Antoine?"

"What is that to you?"

"I want to know. I am in an inquisitive mood to-day."

"I was going to Manasses."

"To Manasses the Jew!"

"You go to Ruggieri, the poisoner, and think nothing of it."

"I go where I like; I am the King."

"What you say is better calculated to sicken a person than to answer him."

"Besides, as I said already, Bussy was the challenger."

"Bussy?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At Saint-Luc's ball."

"Bussy challenged five men? What nonsense! Bussy is brave, but Bussy is not a madman."

“*Par la Mordieu!* I tell you I heard the challenge myself. Moreover, he is just the kind to do such a thing, since, in spite of all you say, he has wounded Schomberg in the thigh, D'Épernon in the arm, and has almost killed Quélus.”

“Ah, indeed!” answered the prince: “he told me nothing of that. I must congratulate him.”

“Well, I,” said the King, “do not purpose congratulating anybody; but I am very decided on making an example of this swash-buckler.”

“And I,” retorted Anjou, “whom your friends attack, not only in the person of Bussy, but even in my own, — I intend to learn whether or not I am your brother, and whether there is a single man in France, your Majesty excepted, who has the right to look me in the face and refuse to lower his eyes, if not through respect, at least through fear.”

At this moment, attracted by the squabble between the two brothers, Bussy appeared, gayly attired in his dress of pale-green satin with its knots of rose.

“Sire,” said he, inclining before Henri, “deign to receive my most humble respects.”

“*Pardieu!* he is here,” said Henri.

“Your Majesty, apparently, has done me the honor of speaking about me?”

“Yes,” answered the King, “and I am very glad to see you. Whatever they may say, your face is the very picture of health.”

“Sire, a good blood-letting always brightens up the complexion,” said Bussy, “and so mine must be very bright this evening.”

“Well, as you have been beaten and injured, make your complaint, Seigneur de Bussy, and I will do you justice.”

“Pardon me, sire, I have been neither beaten nor injured, and I make no complaint.”

Henri seemed astounded, and looked at the Duc d'Anjou.

“Well! what were you saying a moment ago?” he asked.

“I was saying that Bussy was wounded by a dagger in the side.”

“Is that true, Bussy?” asked the King.

“Since your Majesty's brother avouches for it, it must be true; the first prince of the blood could not lie.”

“And although you have a wound in your side,” said Henri, “you did not complain?”

"The only case in which I should complain, sire, would be, if I happened to lose my right hand, for that might prevent me from avenging myself; and yet," continued the incorrigible duellist, "I don't know but that I might still manage to avenge myself with the left."

"Insolent rascal!" murmured Henri.

"Sire," said the Duc d'Anjou, "you have spoken of justice; then do justice; we ask for nothing better. Order an inquiry, name the judges, and then it shall be known who prepared the ambush, who plotted murder."

Henri blushed.

"No," said he. "I prefer this time to be ignorant with which party the wrong lies and to grant a general pardon. I prefer compelling these fierce enemies to make peace, and I am sorry that Schomberg and D'Épernon are kept away by their wounds. Come, M. d'Anjou, which of my friends was the most violent on this occasion? It ought to be easy for you to answer, since you claim you saw them."

"Quélus, sire," answered the Duc d'Anjou.

"By my soul, yes, sire!" said Quélus; "I make no secret of it, and his Highness has seen things clearly."

"Then," said Henri, "let M. de Bussy and M. de Quélus make peace in the name of all the rest."

"Oh, sire!" exclaimed Quélus, "what does this mean?"

"It means that you are to embrace here in my presence, this very moment."

Quélus frowned.

"What, signor," said Bussy, turning round to Quélus, and imitating the gestures of an Italian pantaloon, "will you not do me this favor?"

The sally was so unexpected and made with such dash, that the King himself could not help laughing.

Then Bussy drew near to Quélus.

"You come-a now, monson; the King-a wills it," said he, and threw both arms about his neck.

"I hope this does not bind us to anything," whispered Quélus to Bussy.

"Rest easy," replied Bussy, in the same tone. "We'll meet, some day or other."

Quélus drew back in a fury, with flaming cheeks and disordered curls.

Henri frowned, and Bussy, still imitating a pantaloon, whirled round on his heels and passed out of the council chamber.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PETIT COUCHER OF HENRI III.

AFTER this scene, beginning so tragically and ending so comically, the report of which was quickly noised abroad outside the Louvre, the King, still in a rage, took the way to his apartments, followed by Chicot, who asked for his supper.

"I'm not hungry," said the King, as he stepped over the threshold.

"It's possible," said Chicot; "but I'm famished, and I should like a bite at something, if it were only a leg of mutton."

The King acted as if he had not heard. He unclasped his mantle, laid it on the bed, took off his cap, which was kept on his head by four long black pins, and flung it on a chair. Then, proceeding to the lobby that led to Saint-Luc's room, between which and his own there was but a simple wall:

"Wait for me here, Chicot," said he, "I shall return."

"Oh, there's no hurry, my son," said the jester; "in fact," he added, listening to Henri's footsteps as they died away, "I am anxious to have time enough to get up a little surprise for your benefit."

Then, when there was complete silence: "Ho, there!" said he, opening the door of the ante-chamber.

A valet ran up.

"The King has changed his mind," said he; "he wants a nice supper prepared for himself and Saint-Luc. He gave special recommendations as to the wine. Begone, lackey."

The valet turned on his heels and hastened to execute Chicot's orders, not doubting they were those of the King.

As for Henri, he had passed, as we have said, into the chamber of Saint-Luc, who, having been notified of his Majesty's visit, had gone to bed, and was having prayers read for him by an old servant who, having followed him to the Louvre, was now a prisoner like himself. In a gilt arm-chair, in a corner, the page introduced by Bussy was sleeping profoundly, the head resting on the hands.

The King took in all this at a glance.

"Who is that young man?" he asked Saint-Luc, uneasily.

"Did not your Majesty, when you detained me here, authorize me to send for a page?"

"No doubt I did," answered the King.

"Well, I have taken advantage of your permission, sire."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Does your Majesty repent of granting me this indulgence?" asked Saint-Luc.

"Not at all, my son, not at all: on the contrary, amuse yourself. Well, how do you feel?"

"Sire," said Saint-Luc, "I am in a terrible fever."

"Of a truth, my child," said the King, "your face is very red. Let me feel your pulse; you know I am something of a doctor."

Saint-Luc held out his wrist, with visible ill-temper.

"Hum!" said the King, "intermittent, agitated!"

"Oh, sire," returned Saint-Luc, "I am really and truly very ill."

"Do not be alarmed," said Henri, "I'll send my own doctor to attend you."

"Thanks, sire, but I detest Miron."

"Then I'll take care of you myself."

"Sire, I could not allow it" —

"I will have a bed made up for you in my own room, Saint-Luc. We'll talk the whole night. I have a thousand things to relate to you."

"Ah!" cried Saint-Luc, driven to desperation, "you call yourself a doctor, you call yourself a friend, and you would hinder me from getting a wink of sleep. *Morbleu!* doctor, you have a queer way of treating your patients! *Morbleu!* sire, you have a singular fashion of showing your affection for your friends!"

"What! you would remain by yourself, and you in such a state of suffering?"

"Sire, I have my page, Jean."

"But he sleeps."

"I like the people who nurse me to be sleepy; at least they won't prevent me from sleeping myself."

"Let me watch by your bed. I will not speak to you unless you are awake."

"Sire, I am very ill-humored when I awake, and I should have to ask your pardon for all the foolish things I should be sure to say when only half-awake."

"Well, at least, come and wait upon me while I am preparing for bed."

"And I shall be free afterward to go to bed myself?"

"Perfectly free."

"Well, I agree. But I warn you you'll find me but a poor courtier. I can't stand, I'm so sleepy."

"You may yawn at your ease."

"What tyranny! — when you had all your other friends to call on!"

"Ah, yes, my other friends are in a nice condition. Bussy has led them a pretty dance, I can tell you: Schomberg has a wound in his thigh, D'Épernon has his wrist slashed, and Quélus is still dizzy with the blow he got yesterday and the embrace a while ago. Of course, D'O and Mangirou are left; but the one bores me to death and the other is always sulky."

"Would your Majesty be kind enough to leave me now?"

"Why are you so anxious to get rid of me?"

"I assure you, sire, I shall be with you in five minutes."

"In five minutes, agreed. But not more than five, you understand? And spend those five minutes in inventing a few diverting stories so that we may have a laugh together."

And then the King, who had half achieved his purpose, left the apartment, half satisfied.

As soon as the door closed behind him, the page started up and was at the bedside in a twinkling.

"Oh, Saint-Luc!" said she, when the sound of the King's footsteps could no longer be heard, "are you going to leave me again? Great heavens! this is actual torture! I am dying of fright. What if I were to be discovered!"

"My dear Jeanne," said Saint-Luc, "Gaspard, whom you see yonder," and he pointed to the old servant, "will protect you against annoying curiosity."

"Then I might just as well go away at once," said the young woman, blushing.

"If you insist on doing so, Jeanne," said Saint-Luc, sadly, "I'll see that you are taken back safely to the Hôtel de Montmorency, for I alone am imprisoned here. But if you were as kind-hearted as you are beautiful, and had a little love for your poor Saint-Luc, you would wait for him a few moments. I shall pretend to be suffering so seriously from my head and nerves that the King will soon get tired of so melancholy a companion and let me leave him."

Jeanne lowered her eyes. "Go then," said she, "I will wait for you; but, like the King, I shall say to you: Do not be long."

"Jeanne, my darling Jeanne, you are adorable," exclaimed Saint-Luc. "Depend upon it, I shall be with you again at the earliest possible moment. Besides, an idea has occurred to me which may bear fruit; I will tell it to you when I return."

"And that idea will restore you to liberty?"

"I hope so."

"Then go; go at once."

"Gaspard," said Saint-Luc, "take good care that no one enters for the next quarter of an hour. At the end of that time, lock the door and bring me the key. I shall be in the King's apartment. Then go to the hôtel and tell them not to be uneasy at the absence of Madame la Comtesse; you need not return until to-morrow."

Gaspard promised, with a smile, to execute the orders, which the young woman heard with a blush.

Saint-Luc took his wife's hand, kissed it tenderly, then hurried to the room of the King, who was growing impatient.

Jeanne, alone, and trembling with terror, crouched behind the ample curtains of the bed, and there, at once anxious and wrathful, she, too, was planning how to escape successfully from her present strange situation, twirling an air-cane she had in her hand.

When Saint-Luc entered the King's room he inhaled the pungent, voluptuous perfume which filled the royal apartment. In fact, Henri's feet were planted on a heap of flowers, the stalks of which had been cut off, for fear they might irritate his Majesty's delicate skin: roses, jasmynes, violets, gilly-flowers, in spite of the rigor of the season, formed a soft, odorous carpet for King Henri.

The chamber, whose ceiling had been lowered and decorated with fine paintings, was, as we have said, supplied with two beds, one of which was so wide that, although its head rested against the wall, it occupied nearly two-thirds of the room.

This bed was hung with gold and silken tapestry representing mythological characters, the subject being the story of Ceneus, or Cenis, at one time a man, at another a woman, which metamorphosis was not effected, it may well be imagined, without the most fantastic efforts on the part of the artist's imagination. The canopy was of cloth of silver, worked with gold and figures in silk, and the royal arms, richly embroidered, hung immediately above the head of the bed.

There were the same kind of hangings on the windows as on

the beds, and the sofas and chairs were covered with similar material. A silver-gilt lamp was suspended from the ceiling by a golden chain, and the oil in this lamp shed a delicious perfume as it burned. On the right of the bedstead, a satyr in gold held in his hand a candelabrum with four rose-colored tapers, also perfumed. These tapers, as long as church candles, were sufficient, with the lamp, to illuminate the apartment.

The King, with his feet resting on the flowers that covered the floor, was seated in an ebony chair inlaid with gold. He had seven or eight spaniel puppies in his lap; they were very young, and were licking his hands. Two servants were curling and dressing his hair, which was tucked up like a woman's, his hooked mustaches, and his thin, filmy beard. A third was daubing the prince's face with an unctuous layer of rose-colored cream that had a very pleasant smell.

Henri had his eyes closed, allowing himself to be operated on with all the majestic gravity of an Indian god.

"Saint-Luc!" said he, "where is Saint-Luc?"

Saint-Luc entered. Chicot took him by the hand and led him before the King.

"Now," said he, "here he is, your friend Saint-Luc. Order his face to be washed, or rather varnished, with your cream; if you don't take this indispensable precaution, something awful is sure to happen: he will smell bad to you, who smell so good, or you will smell too good to him, who does n't smell at all. By the way," added Chicot, stretching out his hands, "I think I 'll have a try at these greases and combs myself."

"Chicot! Chicot!" cried Henri, "your skin is too dry and would absorb too great a quantity of my cream; I have hardly enough for myself; and your hair is so rough it would break my combs."

"My skin has got dried up in fighting the battles of an ingrate prince, and, if my hair is rough, it is because it has got into the habit of bristling up at your continual indiscretions. Well, if you refuse me the cream for my cheeks, that is to say, for my exterior, all right, my son, that's all I have to say."

Henri shrugged his shoulder, not at all inclined to be amused at the quips of his jester.

"Leave me, you are beginning to dote," said he.

Then, turning to Saint-Luc:

"Well, my son," he asked, "how is your head?"

Saint-Luc clapped his hand on his forehead and uttered a groan.

"Only fancy," continued Henri, "I have seen Bussy d'Amboise — A-a-h ! monsieur," said he, turning to the hair-dresser, "you are burning me."

The hair-dresser fell on his knees.

"You saw Bussy d'Amboise, sire ?" inquired Saint-Luc, shivering.

"Yes," answered the King ; "just think of it ! these idiots — five of them together — attacked him, and they failed. I will have them broken alive on the wheel. If you had been there, Saint-Luc ! Eh ?"

"Sire," returned Saint-Luc, "it is probable I should not have been luckier than my comrades."

"Don't talk nonsense. I would wager a thousand crowns of gold you'd touch Bussy ten times for every six he'd touch you. *Pardieu !* we must look to this to-morrow. Do you fence still, my child ?"

"Why, of course, sire."

"I mean, do you practise often ?"

"Almost every day when I am in good health ; but when I am ill, sire, I am absolutely good for nothing."

"How often have you touched me ?"

"We used to be pretty evenly matched, sire."

"Yes, but I fence better than Bussy. God's death, man," said Henri, turning to the barber, "you are tearing out my mustache !"

The barber fell on his knees.

"Sire," said Saint-Luc, "do you know any remedy for heart disease ?"

"Eat plenty."

"Oh, sire, I believe you are mistaken."

"By no means, I assure you."

"You are right, Valois," said Chicot, "and as I have heart disease, or, maybe, stomach disease, — I am not quite sure which, — I have been following your prescription."

And a singular noise was heard, like the rapid crunching of a monkey's jaws.

The King turned round and beheld Chicot, who, after devouring the supper for two which he had ordered in the King's name, was noisily exercising his mandibles, while swallowing the contents of a cup of Japan porcelain.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Henri. "And pray what the devil are you doing there, Monsieur Chicot?"

"Taking my cream interiorly, since, exteriorly, you have forbidden it."

"Ha! traitor," said Henri, half jerking his head round in such untoward fashion that the pasty finger of his valet filled the King's mouth with cream.

"Eat, my son," said Chicot gravely. "I'm not so tyrannical as thou art; thou'rt permitted by me to use it interiorly or exteriorly."

"Monsieur, you are choking me," said Henri to the valet.

The valet fell on his knees, as the hair-dresser and barber had done before him.

"Some one send for the captain of the guards; some one go for him this instant!" cried Henri.

"And why for the captain of your guards?" inquired Chicot, passing his finger inside his cup and then inside his lips.

"To pass his sword through Chicot's body, and then, skinny as it is, to have it roasted for my dogs."

Chicot drew himself up to his full height:

"God's death!" cried he, "Chicot for your dogs! A man of gentle birth for your beasts! Well, then, let him come on, this captain of the guards of yours, and we'll see!"

And Chicot drew his long sword, with which he cut and thrust so comically, now at the hair-dresser, now at the barber, now at the valet, that the King had to laugh.

"But I am hungry," he said at length, in a lachrymose voice, "and the rascal has eaten up the whole supper himself."

"Thou'rt fantastical, Henri," said Chicot. "Did I not offer to share my supper and you refused? In any case, your soup is to the good; and, as I am no longer hungry, I'm off to bed."

During this time, old Gaspard had brought the key to his master.

"And I, too," said Saint-Luc; "for if I remained longer up, I should be sure to fail in the respect I owe my sovereign, by having one of my nervous attacks in his presence. I am shivering as it is."

"A moment, Saint-Luc," said the King, giving him a handful of little puppies; "here, take them with you."

"Why?"

"To sleep with you. They will catch your disease, and you'll be freed from it."

"Thanks, sire," said Saint-Luc, putting them back in the basket, "I have no confidence in your prescription."

"I will visit you to-night, Saint-Luc," said the King.

"Oh, do not come near me, I entreat you, sire," said Saint-Luc. "You would be sure to startle me out of my sleep, and that, as I have been told, brings on epilepsy."

And, after saluting the King, he passed out of the room.

Chicot had disappeared already.

Two or three others also left, and there remained with the King only the valets, who covered his face with a mask of fine cloth plastered with perfumed cream, in which were holes for the nose, eyes, and mouth. A cap of silk and silver fixed it on the forehead and over the ears.

Next they covered his arms with sleeves of rose-colored satin, well lined with wadded silk, and presented him with gloves made of a skin so supple that one might think them knitted. These gloves came up to the elbows, and were oiled inside with a perfumed unguent that gave them the elasticity so puzzling to those who saw only the exterior.

These mysteries of the toilet ended, he was presented with his soup in a golden cup; but, before bearing it to his lips, he poured half into another cup, in every respect like his own, and ordered it to be conveyed to Saint-Luc, with a message wishing him a good night's rest.

It was then God's turn, who, doubtless, on account of the King's great preoccupation, was treated rather jauntily. Henri said only a single prayer, and did not touch his beads at all, and, his bed having been warmed with coriander, benzoin, and cinnamon, he lay down.

Then, when he had arranged his head comfortably on the numerous pillows, Henri ordered the flowers, which were making the air too heavy, taken away. The windows were opened for a few seconds, to renew the carbon-laden atmosphere. Next, a big fire was suddenly lit in the marble chimney, and as quickly extinguished, but not until it had diffused a gentle warmth through the apartment.

After this the valet let down the curtains and hangings, and introduced the King's favorite dog, Narcisse, which jumped on the bed, turned round, and stretched itself crosswise at the feet of its master.

At last the rose-colored tapers burning in the hands of the golden satyr were blown out, the light of the night-lamp was lowered by the substitution of a smaller wick, and the valet, to whom were intrusted all these details, stole softly out of the room.

And now, more tranquil, more careless and oblivious than the idle monks of his kingdom buried in their fat abbeys, France's King no longer had to give himself the trouble of thinking that there was a France.

He slept.

Half an hour later, the people who watched in the galleries, and who, from their different stations, could distinguish the windows of Henri's chamber, saw through the curtains the royal lamp suddenly go out and the soft rose light which colored the windows replaced by the silvery rays of the moon, and they thought that now his Majesty must assuredly be asleep.

At this moment all sounds had died away, both within and without the palace, and one might have heard a bat fly in the sombre corridors of the Louvre.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE KING WAS CONVERTED IN THE NIGHT, AND NO
ONE KNEW WHY.

Two hours passed thus.

Suddenly there resounded a terrible cry. This cry came from his Majesty's chamber.

Yet the night-lamp was still unlit, the silence was still profound, and no sound was heard except this strange call of the King.

For it was the King who had cried.

Soon was heard the noise of furniture falling, of porcelain breaking, footsteps hurrying wildly about the room; then renewed cries mingled with the barking of dogs. At once, lights gleamed, swords flashed in the galleries, and the heavy steps of the sleepy guards shook the massive pillars of the palace.

"To arms!" was shouted on all sides. "To arms! The King calls; let us run to the King."

And, that very instant, the captain of the guards, the colonel

of the Swiss, the servants of the Château, the arquebusiers on duty, dashed forward and rushed into the royal chamber, which was immediately inundated with a flood of light: twenty torches illuminated the scene.

Near an overturned chair and shattered cups, near the bed, whose coverings were scattered about the floor, stood Henri, at once grotesque and frightful in his night-robe, his hair on end, his eyes staring fixedly.

His right hand was extended, trembling like a leaf in the wind.

His left clutched the hilt of his sword, which he had grasped mechanically.

The dog, as excited as its master, was looking at him and howling.

The King seemed fairly dumb with terror, and all present, not daring to break the silence, questioning one another's eyes, waited in a condition of dreadful anxiety.

Then appeared, half-dressed, wrapped up in a large mantle, the young Queen, Louise de Lorraine, a fair, sweet being, who lived the life of a saint on earth, and who had been awakened by her husband's cries.

"Sire," said she, even more agitated than the others, "in God's name what is the matter? Your cries reached me and I have come."

"It — it — is nothing," stammered the King, without moving his eyes, which seemed to be glaring on some vague form in the air, invisible to all but him.

"But your Majesty cried," answered the Queen. "Is your Majesty, then, ill?"

The terror painted on Henri's features gradually affected all those present. They recoiled, advanced, devoured the King with their eyes, anxious to discover if he were wounded or had been struck by lightning or bitten by some reptile.

"Oh, sire, for Heaven's sake leave us not in this uncertainty!" cried the Queen. "Would you have a doctor?"

"A doctor!" said Henri, in the same sinister tone: "no, the body is not ill; 'tis the soul — the mind. No, no; no doctor — a confessor."

Each one looked at his neighbor, questioned the doors, the curtains, the floor, the ceiling.

But nowhere was there a trace of the invisible object that had so frightened the King.

This inspection added fuel to the general curiosity. And the mystery was growing complicated; the King asked for a confessor!

The demand made, a messenger leaped at once on horseback, a thousand sparks flashed up from the pavement of the Louvre yard, and, five minutes later, Joseph Foulon, Superior of the Convent of St. Genevieve, was aroused and almost dragged from his bed.

When he reached the King the tumult ceased, silence was restored. There were conjectures, questions, guesses, but, above all, there was dismay. "The King is going to confess!"

Early the next morning, the King was up before everybody. He ordered the door of the Louvre closed; it had been opened only to let out the confessor.

Then he summoned his treasurer, his signet-bearer, his master of the ceremonies, took up his black-bound prayer-book, read a few prayers, paused to cut out some of the pictures of the saints, and, suddenly, ordered all his friends to be notified that he required their presence.

The first person visited, in pursuance of this order, was Saint-Luc; but he was sicker than ever. He was exhausted, utterly broken up. His indisposition had taken such a serious turn, his sleep, or rather lethargy, had been so heavy that he alone of all the dwellers in the palace had heard nothing during the night, although separated by but a thin partition from the prince. Consequently, he requested to be allowed to stay in bed, where he would say all the prayers ordered by the King.

At this doleful narrative, Henri made the sign of the cross and commanded his apothecary to be sent to Saint-Luc.

Then he desired all the scourges in the Convent of St. Genevieve to be brought to the Louvre, and, when they came, he went, all clad in black, to Schomberg, who limped; to D'Épernon, who had his arm in a sling; to Quélus, who was still dizzy; to D'O and Maugiron, who trembled, distributing the scourges on his way and bidding them flagellate one another as hard as their arms would let them.

D'Épernon observed that, as his right arm was in a sling, he ought to be excused from the ceremony; considering he could not return the strokes administered to him, there would be, so to speak, a note of discord in the flagellating scale.

Henri III. replied that his penitence would only be the more pleasing to God on that account.

He himself gave the example. After taking off his doublet, vest, and shirt, he wielded the scourge like a martyr. Chicot was beginning to laugh and jeer as usual, but a terrible look from the King taught him that now was not the time. Thereupon he seized a discipline like the others. Only, instead of striking himself, he pitched into his neighbors, and, when they were out of his reach, he lashed the paintings, columns, and woodwork, peeling off the varnish and doing other damage.

All this hubbub had the effect of restoring the King's calmness, externally, although any one could see his mind was still stirred to its very depths.

Suddenly he left his room, ordering those present to follow him. The scourging stopped behind him as if by enchantment. Chicot, alone, continued his flagellation of D'O, whom he detested. D'O, on the other hand, tried to give him as good as he got. It was a regular cat-o'-nine-tails' duel.

Henri passed into the apartments of the Queen. He presented her with a necklace of pearls worth twenty-five thousand crowns, kissed her on both cheeks, which had not happened for more than a year, and begged her to take off the royal ornaments and put on sackcloth.

Louise de Lorraine, always kind and gentle, consented at once. But she asked her husband why he gave her a pearl necklace and wanted her to wear sackcloth.

"For my sins," he answered.

The answer satisfied the Queen, for she knew better than any one the enormous sum-total of the sins for which her husband ought to do penance.

On the return of the King, the scourging is renewed. D'O and Chicot, who had not stopped, are bathed in blood. The King compliments them and tells them they are his true and only friends.

At the end of ten minutes, comes the Queen, clad in her sackcloth. Immediately, tapers are distributed to the court, and, with naked feet during that horrible weather of frost and snow, the fine courtiers and fine ladies, as well as the honest citizens of Paris, all devoted servants of the King and Our Lady, are on the road to Montmartre, at first shivering, but soon warming up under the furious strokes administered by Chicot to all who have the ill-luck to come within reach of his discipline.

D'O acknowledged he was conquered, and filed off fifty yards away from Chicot.

At four in the evening, the lugubrious procession was over. The convents had reaped a rich harvest, the feet of the courtiers were swollen and their backs raw: the Queen had appeared in public in an enormous chemise of coarse linen: the King, with a chaplet of beads, fashioned in the form of death's heads. There had been tears, cries, prayers, incense, and canticles.

The day, as we have seen, had been well spent.

The real fact, however, was every one had endured cold and blows in order to do the King a pleasure, but why the prince, who had been so eager in the dance the evening before, should mangle himself the day after, no one, for the life of him, could tell.

The Huguenots, Leaguers, and Libertines looked on, laughing, while the procession of the flagellants passed, saying, like the true misbelievers they were, that the last procession was far finer and more fervid, which was not true at all.

Henri returned, fasting, with long blue and red stripes on his shoulders. He did not leave the Queen the entire day, and, at every chapel where he halted, he took advantage of the opportunity to promise her that he would grant her new revenues and plan with her new pilgrimages.

As for Chicot, tired of striking, and tired of the unusual exercise to which the King had condemned him, he had stolen off, a little above the Porte Montmartre, and with Brother Gorenflot, one of his friends, he entered the garden of a hostelry in high renown, where he drank some high-spiced wine and eat a widgeon that had been killed in the Grange-Batelière marshes. Then, on the return of the procession, he resumed his rank and went back to the Louvre, running a-muck at the he-penitents and the she-ones, in the most delightful style imaginable, and distributing, as he said himself, his plenary indulgences.

At nightfall the King felt worn out by his fasting, his barefooted pilgrimage, and the furious blows to which he had treated himself. He had a vegetable soup served him, his shoulders bathed, a great fire lit, and then went to visit Saint-Luc, whom he found hale and hearty.

Since the evening before, the King was quite changed; all his thoughts were turned to the vanity of human things, penitence, and death.

"Ah!" said he, in the deep tones of a man disgusted with life, "God has, in good truth, done well to make our existence as bitter as possible."

"Why so, sire?" asked Saint-Luc.

"Because when man is tired of the world, instead of fearing death he longs for it."

"Pardon me, sire," returned Saint-Luc, "speak for yourself, but, in my case, I have not the slightest longing for death."

"Listen, Saint-Luc," said the King, shaking his head: "If you were wise, you would follow my advice, or, to speak more correctly, my example."

"And with great pleasure, sire, if your example pleased me."

"How should you like if I gave up my crown and you your wife, and entered a cloister to-morrow? I have a dispensation from our Holy Father the Pope. We shall make our profession to-morrow. I shall be called Brother Henri"—

"Forgive me, sire, forgive me. You may not think much of your crown, with which you are but too well acquainted, while I think a great deal of my wife, with whom my acquaintance is but slight. Therefore I refuse your offer."

"Why," said Henri, "you are getting better rapidly."

"Never better in my life, sire. My mind is tranquil, my soul joyful. I have a decided bent in the direction of happiness and pleasure."

"Poor Saint-Luc!" said the King, clasping his hands.

"You ought to have made your proposal yesterday, sire. Yesterday I was dull, whimsical, and in pain. This evening it is quite the other way: I spent a pleasant night, quite charming, in fact. And so, my present disposition is to be as gay as a lark. *Mordieu!* pleasure forever!"

"You are swearing, Saint-Luc," said the King.

"Did I swear, sire? 'Tis not unlikely; but, then, if I do not mistake, you sometimes swear yourself."

"Yes, Saint-Luc, I have sworn; but I will never swear again."

"I should not venture to go as far as that. I will swear as little as possible. That's the only thing I can promise. Besides, God is good and merciful when our sins spring from our human weaknesses."

"You think, then, God will pardon me?"

"Oh, I am not speaking of you, sire, I am speaking of your

humble servant. Plague on it! if you have sinned, you have sinned as a king, while I have sinned as a private individual. I hope, on the day of judgment, the Lord will not have the same weights and scales for us."

The King heaved a sigh and murmured a *confiteor*, beating his breast at the *mea culpa*.

"Saint-Luc," said he, at length, "will you spend the night in my room?"

"That's as may be. What shall we do?" asked Saint-Luc, "in your Majesty's room?"

"We shall light it up. I will lie down, and you'll read me the litanies of the saints."

"Thanks, sire."

"You don't like it, then?"

"Not the least in the world."

"So, you forsake me! Saint-Luc, you forsake me!"

"No, quite the contrary, I am not leaving you."

"Ah! you're sure?"

"If you like."

"Certainly, I like."

"But on one condition, a condition *sine qua non*."

"What is it?"

"Your Majesty must have the tables set, send for violins and courtesans, and then, by my faith, we'll dance."

"Saint-Luc! Saint-Luc!" cried the King, appalled.

"Nay!" said Saint-Luc, "I feel myself to-night in a merry humor. Will you drink and dance, sire?"

But Henri did not answer. His mind, generally so sportful and lively, was becoming gloomier and gloomier; it seemed wrestling with some secret thought that pressed it down, as might a leaden weight tied to the claws of a bird which vainly struggled to stretch its wings and fly.

"Saint-Luc," said the King, at length, in a mournful voice, "do you ever dream?"

"Often, sire."

"Do you believe in dreams?"

"Why, of course."

"But why?"

"Oh, because dreams sometimes compensate us for realities. Thus to-night I had a charming dream."

"What was it?"

"I dreamed that my wife" —

"Are you still thinking of your wife, then, Saint-Luc?"

"More than ever."

"Ah!" sighed the King, with an upward glance.

"I dreamed," continued Saint-Luc, "that my wife, with her lovely face, for she is lovely, sire" —

"Alas! yes," returned the King. "Eve was lovely also, O wretched man, and yet she ruined us all."

"Ah! so now I know the occasion of your ill-will. But to return to my dream, sire. Do you wish me?"

"I, too, dreamed" —

"My wife, then, with her lovely face, had taken to herself the wings and form of a bird, and, braving bolts and bars, had flown over the walls of the Louvre, knocked at my window, with a delicious little cry, which I understood plainly, and said, 'Open, Saint-Luc; let me in, my husband.'"

"And you opened?" said the King, almost in a tone of despair.

"I wager you I did," answered Saint-Luc, emphatically.

"Worldling!"

"Worldling, as much as you like, sire."

"And then you awoke?"

"No, sire, I took care not to; the dream was far too charming."

"And did you continue to dream?"

"As long as I could, sire."

"And you expect to-night" —

"To dream again, saving your Majesty's favor. Now you understand why I decline your kind request to go and read prayers to you. If I am compelled to keep awake I want, at least, to have something that will make up for my dream; and so, if, as I have already mentioned, your Majesty sends for the violins" —

"Enough, Saint-Luc, enough," said the King, rising, "you are damning yourself, and would damn me if I remained here any longer. Adieu, Saint-Luc; God grant that, instead of that diabolical dream, he sends you some saving vision which may induce you to-morrow to share my penitence and be saved along with me."

"I doubt it, sire, indeed. I am so decided on the matter that the best advice I can give your Majesty is to turn that libertine, Saint-Luc, out of the Louvre to-night, seeing that he has made up his mind to die impenitent."

"No," replied Henri, "no, I hope that on to-morrow grace will touch his heart as it has touched mine. Good evening, Saint-Luc; I will pray for you."

"Good evening, sire; I will dream for you."

And Saint-Luc began humming the first couplet of a song, more than indecorous, which the King was fond of singing when in good humor. Thereupon his Majesty beat a retreat, closing the door and murmuring as he entered his own room:

"My Lord and my God! thy wrath is just and lawful, for the world grows worse and worse!"

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW THE KING AND CHICOT WERE AFRAID OF BEING AFRAID.

AFTER leaving Saint-Luc the King found the whole court assembled in the grand gallery, as he had ordered.

Then he distributed some favors among his friends, banished D'O, D'Épernon, and Schomberg to the provinces, threatened Mangiron and Quéhus with trial if they had any more quarrels with Bussy, gave the latter his hand to kiss, and pressed his brother François to his heart.

As for the Queen, he was lavish in his expressions of love and praise in her regard, so that those present drew the most favorable auguries from his behavior as to the succession of the crown of France.

When the hour for retiring drew near it was easy to be seen that the King was putting off that hour as late as possible; at length the clock of the Louvre struck ten: Henri looked long and earnestly in every direction; apparently he was trying to make a choice among his friends of the person he should select for the office of reader, the office refused by Saint-Luc a few moments before.

Chicot noticed what the King was doing.

With his customary audacity he exclaimed:

"I say, Henri, you have been casting sheep's eyes at me all the evening. Would you be thinking, peradventure, of bestowing on me a fat abbey with an income of ten thousand livres? Zounds! what a prior I should make! Give it, my son, give it!"

"Come with me, Chicot," said the King. "Good evening, gentlemen, I am about to retire."

Chicot turned to the courtiers, twisted his mustache, and, with the most gracious air imaginable, rolling his big, soft eyes, repeated, parodying Henri :

"Good evening, gentlemen, we are about to retire."

The courtiers bit their lips ; the King reddened.

"Ho there !" cried Chicot, "my hair-dresser, my valet, and, especially, my cream."

"No," said the King, "there is no need of all that this evening. We are near Lent, and I am doing penance."

"I regret the cream," said Chicot.

The King and his jester entered the apartment with which we are all so well acquainted.

"Oho, Henri," said Chicot ; "so I am the favorite, the indispensable individual, then, am I ? Why, I must be very pretty, prettier than that Cupid, Quélus, even."

"Silence, you fool ; and you, gentlemen of the toilet, retire," said the King.

The valets obeyed, the door was shut, and Henri and Chicot were alone. Chicot looked at the King with amazement.

"Why are you sending them away ?" asked the jester ; "we have not yet been greased. Is it that you are thinking of greasing me with your own royal hand ? Faith, it will be penance like the rest."

Henri did not answer. Everybody had left the chamber, and the two kings, the fool and the sage, looked at each other.

"Let us pray," said Henri.

"Excuse me," returned Chicot ; "no fun in praying. If it was for that you brought me here, I prefer returning to the bad company I left. Adieu, my son, good evening."

"Stay," said the King.

"Oh, oh !" retorted Chicot, drawing himself up ; "this is regular tyranny. Thou'rt a despot, a Phalaris, a Dionysius, You really make me tired. You force me to spend a whole day in mangling the shoulders of my friends, and, seemingly, you are now in the humor to begin again to-night. Plague take it, Henri, don't let us begin it again ! There are only two of us here ; and, when there are only two, every stroke tells !"

"Hush, you wretched babbler, and think of repentance," said the King.

"Ha! now I see what you mean; I repent. And of what, pray? Of being the buffoon of a monk? *Confiteor* — I repent. *Mea culpa* — through my fault, through my fault, through my very great fault!"

"No sacrilege, wretch!" cried the King; "no sacrilege, I say!"

"Oh, indeed!" retorted Chicot. "I'd rather be shut up in a den of lions or a cage of monkeys than to be in the room of a mad king. Farewell! I'm off."

The King took the key out of the lock.

"Henri," said Chicot, "I warn thee that thy aspect is sinister; and, if I am hindered from leaving, I will cry out, call for help, break the door, smash the windows — help! help!"

"Chicot, my friend," said the King, in his most melancholy tone, "you are taking advantage of my sad condition."

"Ah, I understand," returned Chicot, "you are afraid of being alone; all tyrants are like that. Well, why can't you have a dozen chambers built, like Dionysius, or a dozen palaces, like Tiberius. Meantime, you take my long sword, and I'll carry the scabbard with me to my room."

At the word "afraid," Henri's eyes had glared; then, with a strange shiver, he had risen and crossed the chamber. He was so tremulous, his face was so pallid, that Chicot began to think him really ill, and, after the King had walked three or four times up and down the floor, he said, apprehensively:

"Come, come, my son, what ails you? Tell your troubles to your own Chicot."

The King halted before the jester, and gazing at him, said:

"Yes, you are my friend, my only friend."

"Then," returned Chicot, "there is the Abbey of Valencey, which is vacant."

"Listen, Chicot," said Henri; "are you discreet?"

"Also that of Pithiviers, where you can eat delicious lark pies."

"In spite of your buffooneries, you are a courageous man," continued the King.

"Then don't give me an abbey, give me a regiment."

"Ay, and even a prudent man."

"Then don't give me a regiment, make me a member of your privy council. But no; I fancy I should prefer a regiment or an abbey; I won't be a councillor — I should always have to be of the King's opinion."

"Hush, Chicot, hush! the hour, the terrible hour is drawing nigh."

"Oh, are you going over all that again?" said Chicot.

"You are going to see, to hear."

"See what? hear whom?"

"Wait. The issue will teach you things you may wish to know. Wait."

"No, no, I have n't the slightest intention of waiting; why, what mad dog, I wonder, bit your father and mother on the fatal night you were begotten!"

"Chicot, are you brave?"

"I should rather say so! But, *tudiable*, I don't put my bravery to the touch in this fashion. When the King of France and Poland shrieks out in the night so as to create a scandal in the Louvre, the presence of an insignificant person like myself in your apartment would dishonor it. Good-by, Henri, summon your captains, your Swiss, your doorkeepers, and let me scamper off. A plague on your invisible dangers! I have no notion of bumping up against a peril I know nothing of!"

"I command you to remain," said the King, authoritatively.

"Well, upon my soul! — a nice master you are to want to command a fellow that's in a regular panic. I'm afraid — do you hear? I'm afraid, I tell you. Help, help! Fire!"

And Chicot, as if to get away as far as possible from danger, jumped on the table.

"Well, you scamp," said the King, "I see I shall have to tell you everything, since that is the only way to keep your mouth shut."

"Aha!" cried Chicot, rubbing his hands, getting off the table cautiously, and drawing his enormous sword; "once I am warned, I don't care; we'll fight the matter out between us. Go on, go on, my son. Would it be a crocodile that's after you, eh? Don't be alarmed; look at that blade — sharp as a razor; I pare my corns with it once a week, and they're tough ones, I can tell you. You said it was a crocodile, Henri, did n't you?"

And Chicot sank back in a big chair and placed the sword between his thighs, crossing his legs over it, so that it looked not unlike the caduceus of Mercury, entwined by those symbols of peace, the serpents.

"Last night," said Henri, "I was asleep" —

"And I also," interrupted Chicot.

"Suddenly a breath swept over my face."

"It was that cur of yours that was hungry," said Chicot, "and was licking the grease off your face."

"I half awoke and felt my beard bristle with terror under my mask."

"Ah! you make me shiver deliciously," said Chicot, coiling himself in his armchair and resting his chin on the pommel of his sword.

"Then," continued the King, in tones so weak and trembling that they hardly reached Chicot's ear, — "then a voice resounded in the room with a vibration so doleful that my mind was entirely unsettled."

"The voice of the crocodile. I understand. I remember reading in Marco Polo that the crocodile has a terrible voice resembling the cry of a child; but do not be uneasy, my son; if he come, we'll kill him."

"Are you listening attentively?"

"*Pardieu!* am I listening?" said Chicot, starting up as if he were on wires. "I am all ears, as still as a post and as dumb as an oyster. Go on."

Henri went on, in tones gloomier and more lugubrious than ever.

"'Miserable sinner,' said the voice" —

"Bah!" interrupted Chicot; "so the voice spoke? It was not a crocodile, then?"

"'Miserable sinner' said the voice, 'I am the voice of the Lord thy God!'"

Chicot took a leap and was again plump down in his armchair.

"The voice of God?" he asked.

"Ah! Chicot," replied Henri, "it was an awful voice."

"It was n't a sweet-toned voice, then? something like the sound of a trumpet, as we are told in Scripture?" inquired Chicot.

"'Art thou there? Dost hear?' continued the voice. 'Dost thou hear, O hardened sinner? Art thou indeed resolved to persevere in thy iniquity?'"

"Ah, really now!" said Chicot. "Why, upon my word, the voice of God is a little like the voice of your people, after all."

"Next," resumed the King, "followed many other reproaches, which, I assure you, Chicot, hurt me very much."

"Still, let us have a little more, my son," said Chicot; "continue, tell me what the voice said; I want to know if God is a well-informed person."

"Pagan!" cried the King, "if you doubt, I will have you punished."

"I doubt?" said Chicot; "oh, not at all. The only thing that puzzles me is that God should have waited till now to reproach you in the style you mention. He has become very patient since the Deluge. Well, my son, you had an awful fright?"

"Awful!" answered Henri.

"There was some reason for it."

"The perspiration rolled down my temples and the marrow seemed to dry up in my bones."

"As in Jeremiah; quite natural; upon my word as a gentleman, I don't know what I should have done in your place; and then you called?"

"Yes."

"And they came?"

"Yes."

"And a thorough search was made?"

"Everywhere."

"And God was not discovered?"

"Nothing was seen."

"It's frightful."

"So frightful that I sent for my confessor."

"Ah, good! he came?"

"On the instant."

"Come now, my son, do violence to yourself and try to be frank with me. What does your confessor think of this revelation?"

"He shuddered."

"I should think he would."

"He crossed himself, and ordered me to repent as God had warned me to do."

"Very good indeed! there's never any harm in repenting. But what did he say of the vision itself, or, rather, of what you heard, for you don't seem to have seen anything?"

"He said it was providential, a miracle; that now I must think of nothing but the good of the state. And so, this morning, I have given"—

"This morning you have given, my son?"

"A hundred thousand livres to the Jesuits."

"Admirable!"

"And mangled my own flesh and that of my young lords with scourges."

"Perfect. And then?"

"And then. Give me your opinion, Chicot. I am not now talking to the jester, but to a sensible man who is my friend."

"Well, sire," replied Chicot, seriously, "I believe your Majesty has had a nightmare."

"You believe, then, that"—

"Your Majesty has had a dream, which will not recur unless you let your mind dwell too much upon it."

"A dream?" said Henri, shaking his head. "No, no, I was wide awake, that you may be sure of, Chicot."

"You were asleep, Henri."

"I slept so little that my eyes were wide open, I tell you."

"I sleep in that way myself."

"Yes, but I saw with my eyes, and that does not really happen when we are asleep."

"And what did you see?"

"I saw the moon shining through the windows of my chamber, and there, where you are standing, Chicot, I beheld the amethyst in the hilt of my sword glowing with a sombre light."

"And what had become of the light in your lamp?"

"It was extinguished."

"A dream, my poor son, a pure dream."

"Why do you not believe me, Chicot? Is it not said that the Lord speaks to kings when he wishes to work some great change on the earth?"

"Yes, it is true enough he speaks to them, but in so low a tone that they never hear him."

"What makes you so incredulous?"

"Because you heard so very distinctly."

"Well, then, have you any idea why I bade you remain?" said the King.

"*Parbleu!* I have my own ideas."

"It was that you might hear for yourself what the voice may say."

"So that, if I repeat what I heard, it will be believed I am uttering some buffoonery or other. Chicot is such a paltry, insignificant, mad creature that, no matter what he says, no one will believe him. Not badly played, my son."

"Why not rather think, my friend," said the King, "that

I am confiding this secret to you because of your well-known fidelity?"

"Ah, do not lie, Henri, for, if the voice come, it will reproach you for your mendacity, and God knows you have enough of sins to your credit already. But no matter, I accept the commission. I shall not be sorry to hear the voice of the Lord; perhaps he may have something to say to me also."

"What ought I to do, then?"

"Go to bed, my son."

"But if"—

"No 'buts.'"

"Still"—

"Do you think you're likely to hinder the voice of God from speaking because you happen to be standing? A king is taller than other men only by the height of his crown; believe me, Henri, when he is bareheaded he is the same height as other men, and sometimes an inch or two lower."

"Very well," said the King, "you stay."

"I have agreed to that already."

"Then I'll lie down."

"Good!"

"But you won't go to bed?"

"Have n't the least intention."

"I'll take off nothing but my doublet."

"Do as you like."

"I'll keep my breeches on."

"Wisely determined."

"And you?"

"I stay where I am."

"And you will not sleep?"

"That I can't promise. Sleep, like fear, my son, is independent of the will."

"You will, at least, do what you can?"

"Rest easy. I'll pinch myself; besides, the voice will rouse me up."

"Do not joke about the voice," said Henri, who drew back the leg he had already in bed.

"Oh, don't bother me," said Chicot, "or do you want me to put you to bed?"

The King sighed, and after anxiously scrutinizing every corner of the apartment, slipped, shivering, into bed.

"Now," thought Chicot, "it's my turn."

And he stretched his limbs out in an armchair, arranging the cushions and pillows behind and beside him.

"How do you feel, sire?"

"Pretty fairly," said the King; "and you?"

"Quite comfortable. Good-night, Henri."

"Good-night, Chicot, but don't sleep."

"I'll take good heed not to," said Chicot, yawning as if he were tired to death.

And both closed their eyes, the King pretending to sleep and Chicot asleep really.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THE VOICE OF THE LORD BLUNDERED AND TOOK CHICOT FOR THE KING.

THE King and Chicot were almost quiet and silent for about ten minutes. Suddenly the King started and sat up in bed.

Chicot, who was plunged in the sweet drowsiness that precedes sleep, was aroused by the noise and the movement, and did the same.

Both gazed wildly at each other.

"What is it?" asked Chicot, in a low voice.

"The breath," said the King, in tones still lower, "the breath on my face."

At the same instant one of the candles, held by the golden satyr, was extinguished, then a second, then a third, then the last.

"Oh! Oh!" said Chicot, "what a breath!"

Chicot had hardly uttered these words when the lamp was extinguished also, and the apartment was lit only by the last gleams of the fire in the chimney.

"Danger ahead!" cried Chicot, on his feet in an instant.

"He is going to speak," said the King, cowering in bed; "he is going to speak."

"Then," said Chicot, "listen."

That very moment was heard a hollow, hissing voice, apparently speaking from the side of the bed.

"Hardened sinner, art thou there?" it said.

"Yes, yes, Lord," stammered Henri through his chattering teeth.

"Oh! Oh!" said Chicot, "that is a very hoarse voice to come all the way from heaven. Still, this is awful, all the same."

"Dost thou hear me?" said the voice.

"Yes, Lord," mumbled Henri, "and I listen, prostrate before thy wrath."

"Didst thou think, then," continued the voice, "thou wert obeying me when taking part in all those external mummeries thou wert engaged in to-day, thy heart remaining untouched the while?"

"Well said!" exclaimed Chicot. "That hit told."

The King hurt his hands, so tightly did he clasp them. Chicot drew near him.

"Well," murmured Henri, "what do you say now? Do you believe now, infidel?"

"Wait," said Chicot.

"What for?"

"Hush, and listen! Get out of your bed as softly as possible, and let me take your place."

"Why?"

"That the Lord's anger may fall upon me in your stead."

"Do you think he will spare me in that way?"

"We can, at all events, try."

And with affectionate persistence he pushed the King out of the bed and lay down in his place.

"Now, Henri," said he, "go and sit down in my chair and leave the rest to me."

Henri obeyed; he was beginning to understand.

"Thou dost not answer," resumed the voice; "a proof that thou art hardened in sin."

"Oh, pardon! pardon, Lord," said Chicot, in the nasal tones of the King.

Then, leaning over toward Henri: "It is funny, my son," he whispered, "that the good God does not recognize Chicot."

"Humph! it does look queer," answered Henri.

"Wait, you're going to see queerer things still."

"Miscreant!" said the voice.

"Yes, Lord," answered Chicot; "yes, I am a hardened sinner, a frightful sinner."

"Then confess thy crimes, and repent."

"I confess," said Chicot, "that I have been a great traitor to my cousin, Condé, whose wife I seduced, and I repent of it."

"What's that you're saying?" murmured the King. "Pray hold your tongue. That has occurred so long ago that we need not trouble about it."

"Ah, yes, quite right; let us pass to something else," said Chicot.

"Speak," said the voice.

"I confess," continued the false Henri, "that I have been an abominable thief in respect of the Poles, who had elected me their king, running away from them one fine night, and carrying off the crown jewels along with me, and I repent."

"Ha, you caittiff! Why do you recall that?" said Henri. "It was quite forgotten."

"You see, I must continue to deceive him," answered Chicot. "Pray let me alone."

"Speak," said the voice.

"I confess I stole the throne of France from my brother, Alençon, to whom it belonged by right, since I had formally renounced it on becoming King of Poland, and I repent."

"Knave!" said the King.

"I confess that I made an arrangement with my good mother, Catharine de Medicis, to banish out of France my brother-in-law, the King of Navarre, having first destroyed all his friends, and to banish also my sister, Queen Marguerite, after destroying all her lovers, all of which I regret most sincerely."

"Ah! you miscreant!" murmured the King, grinding his teeth in rage.

"Sire, we must not offend God by trying to hide from him what he knows as well as we do."

"I do not want to discuss your political life," the voice went on.

"Ah, you have come to it, then!" continued Chicot, in a most doleful voice; "it's my private life you're after, is it?"

"Undoubtedly," said the voice.

"It is quite true, O my God!" resumed Chicot, still speaking in the name of the King, "that I am lustful, slothful, effeminate, frivolous, and hypocritical."

"All that is true," said the voice, in a hollow tone.

"I have ill-treated women, and especially my wife, the most virtuous of her sex."

"A man ought to love his wife like himself, and prefer her to everything else in the world," said the voice, furiously.

"Ah!" cried Chicot, despairingly, "in that case my sins are indeed great."

"And you have caused others to sin by your example."

"True, true, nothing could be truer."

"You have been very near damning that poor Saint-Luc."

"Ah, then, you're quite sure I have not damned him already?"

"Yes, but that is sure to happen to him and to you, too, if you do not send him back to his family to-morrow morning, at the latest."

"Aha!" said Chicot to the King, "the voice appears to be very friendly to the house of Cossé."

"And if you do not also," continued the voice, "make him a duke and his wife a duchess, as some compensation for her enforced widowhood during the last couple of days."

"And if I do not obey!" asked Chicot, betraying in his voice an inclination to resist.

"If you obey not," resumed the voice, swelling in a terrible fashion, "you will roast for a whole eternity in the same caldron in which Sardanapalus, Nebuchadnezzar, and the Maréchal de Rez are waiting for your company."

Henri III. uttered a groan. The terror that retook possession of him at this threat became more poignant than ever.

"Plague on it, Henri!" said Chicot, "don't you notice the extraordinary interest Heaven appears to be taking in Saint-Luc? The devil fly away with me but you might think he had the good God up one of his sleeves!"

But Henri was not listening to the waggeries of Chicot, or, if he were, they failed to reassure him.

"I am lost," said he, frantically. "I am lost! and this voice from the other world is a forerunner of my death."

"Voice from the other world!" cried Chicot; "ah, this time you are mistaken, for a dead certainty. Voice from the other side, at the most."

"What! a voice from the other side?" asked Henri.

"Why, of course! Don't you understand that the voice comes from the other side of your wall? Henri, the good God is your guest in the Louvre. Probably, like the Emperor Charles V., he is passing through France on his road to hell."

"Atheist! Blasphemer!"

"He does you great honor, Henri; and so accept my congratulations; still, I'm afraid you're giving him a rather cold reception. What! the good God is lodged in your Louvre, only separated from you by a partition, and yet you will not honor him with a visit! Oh, fie, fie! Valois, thou art not thyself. I do not recognize thee; thou'rt not polite."

At this moment a log flamed up in the chimney, and the sudden glare illuminated Chicot's face. There was such an expression of inerriment and mockery on it that the King was amazed.

"What!" said he, "you have the heart to gibe? you dare to" —

"Yes, my son, I do dare," said Chicot, "and you will be as daring as I am in a minute, or else may I be hanged. Collect your wits, then, and do as I tell you."

"You mean go and see" —

"If the good God is really in the chamber next you."

"But if the voice continues speaking?"

"Am I not here to answer it? Besides, it's just as well for me to go on speaking in your name. That will make the voice believe you are here still, for a splendidly credulous voice is this divine voice of ours, and does not know its trade as well at all as it might. Why, for the last quarter of an hour that I have been braying, it has never once recognized me! Really, this is humiliating for the human intellect."

Henri frowned. Chicot had said so much that even his outrageous credulity had received a shock.

"I think you are right, Chicot," said he, "and I should really like" —

"Then go," said Chicot, pushing him.

Henri softly opened the door of the corridor that led to the next apartment, which was, the reader will remember, the room of Charles IX.'s nurse, and now the temporary abode of Saint-Luc. But he had no sooner taken four steps in the lobby than he heard a renewal of the voice's reproaches, now bitterer than ever, and Chicot's broken-hearted responses.

"Yes," said the voice, "you are as fickle as a woman, as effeminate as a sybarite, and as corrupt as a pagan."

"Ah!" whined Chicot, sobbing, "is it my fault, great Lord, if you have made my skin so soft, my hands so white, my nose so delicate, and my mind so fickle? But that is all past, my God! From to-day I will wear nothing but shirts made of the

coarsest cloth. I will sit on a dung-heap, like Job, and eat offal, like Ezekiel."

However, Henri continued to advance along the corridor, noticing with wonder that as the voice of Chicot died away, the other voice increased in volume, and apparently came from Saint-Luc's apartment.

Henri was about to knock at the door, when he perceived a ray of light which filtered through the wide keyhole of the chiselled lock.

He stooped down and looked.

Suddenly Henri, who was very pale, grew red with anger. He started up and rubbed his eyes as if to see better what he could scarcely believe he saw at all.

"God's death!" he murmured, "is it possible any one has dared to play on me such a trick as that?"

For what he had seen through the keyhole was this:

In a corner of the chamber, Saint-Luc in silk drawers and dressing-gown was blowing into an air-cane the threatening words the King had taken for words divine, and near him, leaning on his shoulder, was a young woman in a white diaphanous dress, who, from time to time, snatched the cane from his hands and blew therein, roughening the tones of her voice, all the fancies which might have been first read in her arch eyes and on her smiling lips. Then there were wild outbursts of merriment every time the air-cane was put to use, followed by the doleful lamentations of Chicot, whose imitation of the King was so perfect, whose nasal tones were so natural, that they nearly deceived the King himself; hearing them from the corridor, he almost thought it was he himself who was weeping and whining.

"Jeanne de Cossé in Saint-Luc's room, a hole in the wall, all to mystify me!" growled the King, in a hollow voice. "Ah, the wretches! they shall pay dearly for this!"

And, at a phrase more insulting than the others, breathed by Madame de Saint-Luc into the air-cane, Henri drew back a step and with a kick that was rather vigorous for such an effeminate being, burst in the door, half unfastening the hinges and breaking the lock.

Jeanne, half-naked, uttered a fearful cry and ran to hide behind the curtains, which she wrapped about her.

Saint-Luc, the air-cane still in his hand, fell on his knees, pale with terror, before the King, who was pale with fury.

"Ah!" cried Chicot from the royal chamber, "mercy! I

invoke the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, of all the saints — I grow weak. I am dying."

But in the next apartment, none of the actors in the burlesque scene we have just narrated felt any inclination to speak or move, so rapidly had the situation turned from farce to tragedy.

Henri broke the silence with a word, the stillness with a gesture.

"Begone!" said he, pointing to the door.

And, yielding to a frantic impulse unworthy of a king, he wrested the air-cane from Saint-Luc's hand and raised it as if to strike him. But it was then Saint-Luc's turn to start to his feet, as if moved by a spring of steel.

"Sire," said he, "you have only the right to strike off my head. I am a gentleman."

Henri dashed the air-cane violently on the floor. Some one picked it up. It was Chicot, who, hearing the crash made by the breaking of the door and judging that the presence of a mediator would not be out of place, had dashed out of the room that very instant.

He left Henri and Saint-Luc to clear up matters in whatever way they chose, and, running straight to the curtain, behind which he guessed some one was concealed, he drew forth the poor woman, who was all in a tremble.

"Aha! aha!" exclaimed he, "Adam and Eve after the fall. You chase them out of the garden, Henri, don't you?" he asked, fixing a questioning glance on the King.

"Yes," said Henri.

"Wait, then, I'm going to act as the expelling angel."

And, flinging himself between the King and Saint-Luc, he extended the air-cane above the heads of the guilty couple, as if it were the flaming sword, saying:

"This is my paradise, which you have lost by your disobedience. I forbid you ever to enter it again."

Then whispering in the ear of Saint-Luc, who had thrown his arms about his wife to protect her against the King's anger, if necessary:

"If you have a good horse," said he, "be twenty leagues away from here to-morrow, though you have to kill him."

CHAPTER X.

HOW BUSSY WENT AFTER HIS DREAM AND FOUND IT A
REALITY.

MEANWHILE, Bussy had returned with the Duc D'Anjou, both in pensive mood: the prince, because he dreaded the consequences of his vigorous attack on the King, to which he had, in some sort, been driven by Bussy; Bussy, because the events of the preceding night absorbed him to the exclusion of everything else.

"On the whole," said he to himself when, after paying many compliments to the Duc d'Anjou on the energy he had displayed, he started for his hôtel, "on the whole, there is one thing of which I cannot have any doubt: it is that I have been attacked, have fought, was wounded, for I feel the wound in my right side, and a very painful one it is. Now, when I was fighting, I saw, as plainly as I now see the cross of Les Petits-Champs, the wall of the Hôtel des Tournelles and the battlements of the Bastille. It was in the Place de la Bastille, nearly opposite the Hôtel des Tournelles, between the Rue Sainte-Catherine and the Rue Saint-Paul, that I was attacked, for I was going along the Faubourg Saint-Antoine for Queen Marguerite's letter. It was there, then, that I was attacked, near a door having a barbican, through which, when the door was shut on me, I saw the pale cheeks and flaming eyes of Quélus. I was in an alley; at the end of the alley was a staircase. I tripped over the first step of this staircase. Then I fainted; then began my dream; and then I awoke on the slope of one of the ditches of the Temple, surrounded by a butcher, a monk, and an old woman.

"Now, how comes it that my other dreams have dropped so quickly and completely from my memory, while this one has only been the more firmly fixed on it by the lapse of time? Ah!" exclaimed Bussy, "that is where the mystery comes in."

And he halted, at this very moment, in front of the door of his hôtel, which he had just reached, and, leaning against the wall, he closed his eyes.

"*Morbleu!*" said he, "no dream could leave on the mind such an impression as that. I see the chamber with its figured tapestry; I see the painted ceiling; I see my carved wooden

bed with its damask and gold curtains; I see the portrait, and I see the blonde woman; and finally, I see the merry, kindly face of the young doctor who was brought to my bed with his eyes bandaged; surely, proofs sufficiently conclusive. Let me go over them again: a tapestry, a ceiling, a carved bed, curtains of white damask and gold, a woman, and a doctor. Forward, Bussy! you must set to work to discover all this, and, except you are the stupidest brute in creation, you will find it.

"And, in the first place," continued Bussy, "in order to enter upon my task in a promising manner, I ought to adopt the costume most befitting a night-prowler; then — Hey for the Bastille!"

In virtue of this resolution, not at all a reasonable one in the case of a man who, having narrowly missed being slaughtered at a certain spot in the evening, yet would go on the next day, at very nearly the same hour, and explore the selfsame spot, Bussy went upstairs, had a valet, who was somewhat of a surgeon, attend to his wound, put on long boots which came up to the middle of his thighs, took his stoniest sword, wrapped his cloak about him, got into his litter, stopped at the end of the Rue du Roi-de-Sicile, got out, ordered his people to wait for him, and, after reaching the Rue Saint-Antoine, made his way to the Place de la Bastille.

It was nine in the evening, or thereabouts; the curfew had rung; Paris was becoming a desert. Thanks to a thaw, which a little sunlight and a somewhat warmer atmosphere had brought about during the day, the frozen swamps and mud-holes in the Place de la Bastille had given way to a number of little lakes and precipices through which the much-trodden road, of which we have already spoken, threaded its way.

Bussy made every exertion to find the spot where his horse had fallen, and came to the conclusion that he knew it; he advanced, retreated, made the same movements he remembered having made at the time; he stepped back to the wall; then examined the doors to discover the corner against which he had leaned and the wicket through which he had looked at Quélus. But all the doors had corners, and almost all had wickets, and every one had an alley. By a fatality which will seem less extraordinary if it be considered that, at that period, such a person as a concierge was unknown in citizens' houses, three-fourths of the doors had alleys.

"*Pardieu!*" thought Bussy, in anything but an easy frame of mind, "though I have to knock at every door of them, question every one of the lodgers, spend a thousand crowns in getting old women and servants to talk, I'll find out what I want to find out. There are fifty houses: taking ten houses a night, it will be a job of five nights: all right, but I think I'll wait for drier weather."

When Bussy had finished his monologue, he perceived a small, pale, tremulous light approaching; it glistened on the puddles of water as it advanced, just as might have glistened the light of a beacon on the sea. Its progress in his direction was slow and unequal, now halting, now making a bend to the left, now to the right, sometimes suddenly stumbling, then dancing like a will-o-the-wisp, again marching on steadily, and again indulging in fresh capers.

"Decidedly," said Bussy, "one of the queerest spots in the city is the Place de la Bastille; but no matter, I'll wait and see."

And Bussy, to wait and see more at his ease, wrapped himself in his cloak and entered a doorway. The night was as dark as could be, and it was impossible to distinguish anything at the distance of a few feet.

The lantern continued to advance, making the wildest zig-zags. But as Bussy was not superstitious, he was convinced the light he saw was not one of those wandering Jack-o'-lanterns that were such a terror to mediæval travellers, but purely and simply a cresset suspended from a hand, said hand being itself connected with some body or other.

And, in fact, after the lapse of a few minutes, this conjecture was found to be perfectly correct. About thirty paces or so from him, Bussy perceived a dark form, long and slender as a whipping-post, which form gradually assumed the shape of a human being with a lantern in his left hand; the hand was now stretched out in front, now sideways, now fell quietly along the hip. For a time it looked as if this individual belonged to the honorable confraternity of drunkards, for to drunkenness only could be attributed the strange gyrations in which he turned and the sort of philosophic serenity wherewith he stumbled into mud-holes and floundered through puddles.

Once he happened to slip on a sheet of half-thawed ice, and the hollow echo, brought to Bussy's ears, as well as the

involuntary movement of the lantern, which apparently had taken a sudden leap over a precipice, proved that the nocturnal promenader, with but little confidence in the steadiness of his legs, had sought a more assured centre of gravity.

From that moment Bussy began to feel the respect with which all noble hearts are imbued for belated drunkards, and was advancing to the aid of this "curate of Bacchus," as Master Ronsard would call him, when he saw the lantern rise again with a quickness that indicated its bearer was more solid on his feet than his first appearance evidenced.

"I'm in for another adventure, as far as I can see," murmured Bussy; "better stay quiet awhile."

And as the lantern resumed its progress in his direction, he drew farther back than before into the doorway.

The lantern advanced about ten paces, and then Bussy took note of a circumstance that appeared rather strange: the man who carried the lantern had a bandage over his eyes.

"*Pardieu!*" said he, "a queer fancy that! playing blind-man's-buff with a lantern, particularly in such weather and on such ground as this! Am I, perchance, beginning to dream again?"

Bussy still waited, and the man with the lantern advanced five or six steps more.

"God forgive me," said Bussy, "if I don't believe he's talking to himself. I have it! he's neither a drunkard nor a lunatic: he's simply a mathematician solving a problem."

The last words were suggested to our observer by the last words of the man with the lantern, and which Bussy had heard.

"Four hundred and eighty-eight, four hundred and eighty-nine, four hundred and ninety," murmured the man with the lantern; "it must be close to here."

And thereupon this mysterious personage raised the bandage, and, when he came in front of the house, approached the door, scrutinizing it carefully.

"No," said he, "that is n't it."

Then he lowered his bandage and went on, calculating and walking as before.

"Four hundred and ninety-one, four hundred and ninety-two, four hundred and ninety-three, four hundred and ninety-four — I ought to be right plump on it now," said he.

And he lifted the bandage a second time, and, drawing nigh

the door next to the one where Bussy was hidden, he examined it with no less attention than he had done the first.

"Hem! hem," said he, "that might really be it. Why, it is! no, it is n't. Confound those doors, they're all alike."

"The very reflection I had made myself!" thought Bussy, "which leads me to believe my mathematician is a decidedly clever fellow."

The mathematician put on the bandage again, and resumed his peregrinations.

"Four hundred and ninety-five, four hundred and ninety-six, four hundred and ninety-seven, four hundred and ninety-eight, four hundred and ninety-nine. If there's a door in front of me," said the searcher, "this must be it."

In fact, there was a door, and it was the very one in which Bussy was concealed; the consequence was that when the supposed mathematician raised his bandage he found that he and Bussy were face to face.

"How now?" said Bussy.

"Oh!" returned the promenader, recoiling a step.

"Hullo!" cried Bussy.

"But it is n't possible!" exclaimed the unknown.

"Yes, it is, only it is extraordinary. Why, you are the very same doctor!"

"And you are the very same gentleman!"

"Not a doubt of it."

"Jesus! What an odd meeting!"

"The very same doctor," continued Bussy, "who dressed a wound in the side of a gentleman last night."

"Correct."

"Of course it is. I recognized you at once; you had a light and gentle hand, and a skilful one, too."

"Thanks, monsieur, but I had no notion of finding you here."

"What were you looking for, then?"

"The house."

"Ha!" said Bussy, "you were looking for the house?"

"Yes."

"Then you are not acquainted with it?"

"How could I be?" answered the young man. "I had my eyes bandaged the whole road to it."

"Your eyes bandaged?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then you were really in this house?"

“In this one or in one beside it, I cannot say which, and so I am trying to find” —

“Good!” interrupted Bussy; “then it was not a dream.”

“What do you mean? a dream!”

“It is as well to tell you, my dear friend, that I was under the impression the entire adventure, except the sword-thrust, as you can easily understand, was a dream.”

“Well,” answered the young doctor, “I must say you don’t astonish me at all.”

“Why?”

“I suspected there was a mystery under the affair.”

“Yes, my friend, and a mystery I’m determined to clear up; you’ll help me, will you not?”

“With the greatest pleasure.”

“Good; and now two words.”

“Say them.”

“Your name?”

“Monsieur,” said the young doctor, “I’ll make no bones about answering you. I know well that at such a question I should, to be in the fashion, plant myself fiercely on one leg, and, with hand on hip, say: ‘What is yours, monsieur, if you please?’ But you have a long sword and I have only a lancet; you look like a gentleman and I must seem to you a scamp, for I am wet to the skin and my back is all covered with mud. Therefore, I will answer you frankly. My name is Rémy le Haudouin.”

“Thank you, monsieur, a thousand thanks. I am Count Louis de Clermont, Seigneur de Bussy.”

“Bussy d’Amboise! the hero Bussy!” cried the young doctor, evidently delighted. “What, monsieur, you are the famous Bussy, the colonel who— who— oh!” —

“The same, monsieur,” answered the nobleman, modestly. “And now that we know each other, be good enough to satisfy my curiosity, even though you are wet and dirty.”

“The fact is,” said the young man, glancing down at his belongings, all spotted with mud, — “the fact is, like Epaminondas the Theban, I shall have to remain three days at home, seeing that I have but one pair of breeches and one doublet. But pardon me — you were about to do me the honor of questioning me, I believe?”

“Yes, monsieur, I wished to ask you how you happened to enter that house.”

"The answer will be at once very simple and very complex, as you are going to see," said the young man.

"To the point, then."

"M. le Comte, pray excuse me, until now I have been so embarrassed that I forgot to give you your title."

"Oh, that's of no consequence; continue."

"This, then, is what happened, M. le Comte. I live in the Rue Beautreillis, about five hundred yards from here. I am but a poor surgeon's apprentice, though not an unskilful one, I assure you."

"I know something about that," said Bussy.

"And I have studied very hard, but that has not brought me patients. My name, as I have told you, is Rémy le Haudouin: Rémy, my Christian name; and Le Haudouin because I was born at Nanteuil le Haudouin. Now, about a week ago, a man was brought to me who had had his belly cut open by a knife, just behind the Arsenal. I put back the intestines, which protruded, in their place, and sewed up the skin so neatly that I won a certain reputation in the neighborhood, to which I attribute my good fortune in being awakened last night by a thin, musical voice."

"A woman's!" cried Bussy.

"Oh, don't jump at conclusions, if you please, monsieur; although I am but a rustic, I am sure it was the voice of a servant. I ought to know what's what in that regard, for I am a good deal more familiar with the voices of the maids than of their mistresses."

"And what did you do next?"

"I rose and opened the door, but scarcely was I on the landing when two little hands, not very soft, and not very hard, either, tied a bandage over my eyes."

"Without saying anything?" inquired Bussy.

"Well, no; she said: 'Come along; do not try to see where you are going: be discreet; here is your fee.'"

"And this fee was" —

A purse filled with pistoles which she thrust into my hand."

"Ha! and what was your answer?"

"That I was ready to follow my charming guide. I did not know whether she was charming or not, but I thought the epithet, though it might be a little exaggerated, could do no harm."

"And you followed without making any observation or requiring any guarantee?"

"I have often read of this sort of thing in books, and noticed that it always produced agreeable results for the physician. I followed on, therefore, as I have had the honor of telling you: the path by which I was conducted was very hard: it was freezing, and I counted four hundred, four hundred and fifty, five hundred, and, finally, five hundred and two steps."

"You did well," said Bussy: "it was prudent: you must have been then at the door?"

"I cannot have been far from it, since I have now counted up to four hundred and ninety-nine paces: unless that artful jade, and I suspect her of the foul deed, made me take a round-about course."

"Yes, but even though she were shrewd enough to think of such a thing," said Bussy, "she must, or else the very devil is in it, have given some indication — uttered some name?"

"She did not."

"But you must have noticed something yourself."

"I noticed all that a person can notice who is forced to substitute his fingers for his eyes: that is to say, a door with nails: behind the door, an alley: at the end of the alley, a staircase."

"On the left?"

"Yes. I even counted the steps."

"How many?"

"Twelve."

"And then?"

"A corridor, I believe: for three doors were opened by some one or other."

"Go on."

"Next I heard a voice. Ah, there was no doubt this time! — it was the voice of a lady, soft and sweet."

"Yes, yes, it was hers."

"Undoubtedly, it was hers."

"I am sure of it."

"Well, it's something gained to be sure of something. Then I was shoved into the room where you were lying, and I was told to take off the bandage from my eyes."

"I remember."

"Then I noticed you."

"Where was I?"

"Lying on a bed."

"A bed of white damask, embroidered with flowers in gold?"

"Yes."

"In a room hung with tapestry?"

"Exactly."

"With a painted ceiling?"

"You're right again; in addition, there was between two windows"—

"A portrait?"

"Why, your accuracy surprises me."

"Representing a young woman of about eighteen or twenty?"

"Yes."

"Blonde?"

"Quite correct."

"Beautiful as an angel?"

"Far more so."

"Bravo! What did you do next?"

"I dressed your wound."

"And very well you dressed it, too, by my faith."

"As well as I could."

"Oh, you did it admirably, my dear monsieur, admirably. This morning the wound was quite healthy-looking, nearly healed."

"That is due to a salve I have composed, which is, in my opinion, marvellously effective, for, as I have not been able to try experiments on others, I have often tried them on myself; I have made holes in several places in my skin, and, I give you my good word, these wounds always healed in a couple of days."

"My dear Monsieur Rémy, you are delightful, and I have already got to like you very much. But tell us what occurred after."

"Occurred after? You fainted again. The voice asked about you."

"Where was she when she did so?"

"In the room next yours."

"So that you did not see her?"

"No, I did not see her."

"But you answered?"

"That the wound was not dangerous, and would disappear in twenty-four hours."

"Did she seem pleased?"

"Delighted; since she exclaimed, 'Oh, thank God. How happy it makes me!'"

"She said, 'How happy it makes me?' My dear M. Rémy, I will make your fortune. What next?"

"Next, all was ended. I had dressed your wound and had nothing further to do there; then the voice said to me: 'M. Rémy'" —

"The voice knew your name?"

"Apparently; I suppose some report of the stab I had treated previously, and which I have told you about, had reached there."

"Of course. So the voice said: 'M. Rémy'" —

"Be a man of honor to the end; do not compromise a poor woman who has yielded to a sentiment of humanity: replace your bandage, without attempting to practise any trickery on your guide on your return."

"You promised?"

"I pledged my word."

"And you kept it?"

"Why, that is evident," said the young man, naively, "since I am searching for the door."

"Well," said Bussy, "your behavior is splendid, chivalrous; and, although I am sorry for it at bottom, shake hands, Monsieur Rémy."

And Bussy, full of enthusiasm, tendered his hand to the young doctor.

"Monsieur!" said Rémy, embarrassed.

"Shake hands, I say; you deserve to be a gentleman."

"Monsieur," said Rémy, "it would redound to my eternal glory to shake hands with the valiant Bussy d'Amboise, but meanwhile I have a scruple."

"What is it?"

"There are ten pistoles in the purse."

"Well?"

"It is too much for a man who is glad to get a fee of five sous for a visit, when he gets anything at all; and I was searching for the house" —

"To return the purse?"

"Of course."

"Too much delicacy, my dear Monsieur Rémy, I assure you; you have earned this money honorably, and it belongs to you."

"You think so?" said Rémy, much relieved.

"I am as certain as any one could be: besides, it is not the lady who is in your debt, for I am not acquainted with her, nor is she with me."

"There! you see well that I am bound to restore it for a better reason still."

"Oh, I meant only that I, too, was in your debt."

"You in my debt?"

"Yes, and I will discharge it. What are you doing in Paris? Come, now, make a clean breast of it, my dear Monsieur Rémy, — give me your confidence."

"What am I doing at Paris? Nothing at all, M. le Comte; but I could do something if I had patients."

"Well, as good luck would have it, you have come just in time. What would you say to me for a patient? You can never meet with a better one. Not a day passes that I do not cripple the finest handiwork of the Creator or that the finest handiwork of the Creator does not cripple me. Come, now, will you undertake the task of mending the holes I make in others and that others make in me?"

"Ah, M. le Comte, I am too insignificant to" —

"Quite the contrary. Devil take me if you are n't the very man I want! You have a hand as light as a woman's, and that, with your salve" —

"Monsieur!"

"You must live with me; you will have your own apartments and your own servants. I pledge you my word, if you do not accept you will break my heart. Besides, your task is not ended. My wound requires a little more tending, my dear Monsieur Rémy."

"M. le Comte," replied the young doctor, "I am so enchanted that I do not know how to express my delight. I will work; I shall have patients!"

"Why, no; don't I tell you I want you for myself alone? — including my friends, of course. And now, do you remember anything else?"

"Nothing."

"Then, help me to find my way, that is, if you possibly can."

"But how?"

"Let us see — you are observant: you count steps, feel along walls, notice voices. Now, how is it that, after I had

gone through your hands, I suddenly found myself carried from this house and dumped on one of the slopes of the ditches of the Temple ? ” .

“ You ? ”

“ Yes — I — Had you anything to do with that transportation ? ”

“ No ; on the contrary I should have opposed it, had I been consulted. The cold might have done you serious injury.”

“ Then I am completely at sea,” said Bussy. “ Would you mind searching a little longer with me.”

“ Whatever you wish, monsieur, I wish ; but I am afraid it would be very useless ; all those houses are alike.”

“ As you like,” returned Bussy. “ We must only hope to have better luck during the daytime.”

“ Yes, but then we shall be seen.”

“ Well, then, we must make inquiries.”

“ We shall do so, monsieur.”

“ And we ’ll succeed. Believe me, Rémy, now that we have something real to go upon and that there are two of us at work, we ’ll succeed.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE KIND OF MAN M. BRYAN DE MONSOREAU, THE GRAND HUNTSMAN, WAS.

It was not joy, it was almost delirium that agitated Bussy, when he had acquired the certainty that the woman of his dream was a reality, and that this same woman had bestowed on him the generous hospitality the vague remembrance of which was kept by him deep down in his heart.

Consequently he would not release the young doctor, whom he had just elevated to the position of his physician in ordinary. Dirty as he was, Rémy had to get into Bussy’s litter. The count was afraid, if he lost sight of him for a moment, the young doctor might disappear like another vision ; he determined to bring him to the Hôtel de Bussy, put him under lock and key for the night, and see on the next day whether he should restore him to liberty or not.

During the entire journey he bombarded him with question after question ; but the answers turned in the same limited

circle we have just traced. Rémy le Haudouin knew very little more than Bussy, except that, having been awake all the time, he was quite certain he had not dreamed.

But for the man who is beginning to fall in love — and that such was the case with Bussy was apparent at a glance — it is even a pleasure to have some one near with whom he can talk of the object of his affections. Rémy, it is true, had not seen the woman; but that was really a merit in Bussy's eyes, as he had the better chance of convincing him how superior she was to her portrait.

Bussy would have liked to talk the whole night about this unknown lady, but Rémy entered on his functions as doctor at once and insisted on the wounded man sleeping, or, at least, going to bed; fatigue and pain gave the same counsel to our fine gentleman, and these three forces together carried the day.

But before he did so, he took care to install his new guest in the three rooms on the third story of the Hôtel Bussy which had formerly been occupied by himself. Then, being quite confident that the young physician, satisfied with his new lodgings and with the good fortune bestowed on him by Providence, would not slip away clandestinely from the mansion, he descended to the splendid apartment he slept in himself on the first floor.

When he awoke the next morning he found Rémy standing by his bedside. The young doctor had passed the whole night in doubting of the reality of the good fortune that had dropped on him from the skies, and he longed for Bussy to awake, to find out whether he, like the count, had not dreamed, too.

“Well,” asked Rémy, “how do you feel?”

“Could n't feel better, my dear Esculapius; and I hope you find yourself comfortable, also.”

“So comfortable, my worthy protector, that I would not change places with King Henri, though he must have got over a good deal of ground yesterday on the road to heaven. But that is not the question. Will you let me see the wound?”

“Here it is.”

And Bussy turned on his side to allow the young man to take off the bandage.

The wound was progressing most favorably; in fact, was nearly healed. Bussy was happy, had slept well, and, sleep

and happiness having come to the aid of the surgeon, the latter had almost nothing to do further.

"Well," asked Bussy, "what do you say now, Master Ambroise Paré?"

"I say that I hardly venture to confess you are nearly cured, for fear you might send me back to the Rue Beautreillis, five hundred and two paces from the famous house."

"Which we are sure to find again, are we not, Rémy?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"Well, my dear fellow," said Bussy, warmly shaking his hand, "we'll go there together."

"Monsieur," returned Rémy, with tears in his eyes, "you treat me as your equal."

"I do so because I love you. Does that annoy you?"

"On the contrary," cried the young man, seizing Bussy's hand and kissing it; "on the contrary, I was afraid I had not heard aright. Oh, Monseigneur de Bussy, you will make me go wild with joy!"

"Why, not at all. All I ask is that you love me a little in your turn, regard this house as your home, and allow me to go with the court and witness the presentation of the *estortuaire*¹ by the grand huntsman."

"Ah," said Rémy, "so now we are ready for fresh follies."

"Oh, no; on the contrary, I promise you I'll be very reasonable."

"But you will have to ride?"

"Yes, hang it! that is indispensable."

"Have you a horse of gentle temper and, at the same time, a good goer?"

"I have four to choose from."

"Then select for to-day's ride the sort of a horse you would select for the lady of the portrait; you remember her, don't you?"

"I should think I did! Ah, Rémy, you have, in good sooth, found the way to my heart forever. I dreaded awfully you would hinder me going to this hunt, or rather semblance of a hunt, for the ladies of the court, and even a considerable number of citizens' wives and daughters, will be admitted to it. Now, Rémy, my dear Rémy, you understand clearly that the lady of the portrait must naturally belong either to the

¹ The *estortuaire* was a staff presented by the grand huntsman to the king, for the purpose of thrusting aside the branches when he was riding at full gallop.

court or to the city ; though, certainly, she cannot be a mere citizen's wife or daughter : the tapestries, the pictured ceiling, the bed of damask and gold, and, in a word, all that luxury, accompanied by such refinement and good taste, reveals a woman of rank, or, at all events, a wealthy woman. Now, if I were to meet her yonder !”

“Anything is possible,” answered Rémy, philosophically.

“Except finding the house,” sighed Bussy.

“And getting into it when we have found it,” added Rémy.

“Oh, I don't think there will be any trouble about that when I get to it,” said Bussy. “I have a plan.”

“What is it ?”

“Get some one to pink me again.”

“Good !” said Rémy. “Now I'm hopeful you'll keep me.”

“Be easy on that point,” answered Bussy. “I seem to have known you twenty years, and I pledge you my word as a gentleman I don't believe I could exist without you now.”

The handsome face of the young practitioner glowed with an expression of unutterable delight.

“Well, then,” said he, “it's settled : you go a-hunting in search of the lady, and I go back to Beautrellis in search of the house.”

“I would be curious if we both succeeded,” said Bussy.

And upon this they separated, more like two friends than master and servant.

A great hunting-party had, in fact, been commanded to meet in the Bois de Vincennes on the occasion of the entrance on the functions of his office by M. Bryan de Monsoreau, who had been appointed grand huntsman a few weeks before. The procession on the day previous and the excessive penitence of the King, who began his Lent on Shrove Tuesday, had led to the belief that he would not be present at the hunt in person ; for whenever he fell into one of his devotional fits he never left the Louvre for weeks sometimes, unless, in order to spend his time in the practice of the severest austerities, he entered a convent. But the court now learned to its great astonishment that, about nine in the morning, the King had set out for the Castle of Vincennes and would hunt the stag along with his brother, the Duc d'Anjou, and the rest of the courtiers.

The rendezvous was at Point Saint-Louis, a cross-road so named at the time, it was said, because the famous oak under which the martyr king administered justice could still be seen

there. All were, then, assembled at nine, when the new official, an object of general curiosity, as he was a stranger to almost every one, appeared on a magnificent black steed.

All eyes were directed toward him.

He was a tall man, about thirty-five years old; his face was scarred by the smallpox, and, according to the emotions he experienced, his swarthy complexion was tinged with spots that came and went, impressing the observer most disagreeably, and inclining him to study the countenance more at length, a scrutiny which few countenances can very well bear.

In fact, it is the first impression that evokes our sympathies: the honest smile on the lips, the frank look in the eyes, will find responsive smiles and looks.

Clad in a jacket of green cloth braided with silver, a baldric on which the royal arms were embroidered, with a long feather in his cap, a boar-spear in his left hand, and the *estortuaire* for the King in his right, M. de Monsoreau might be taken for an awe-inspiring lord, but, certainly, not for a fine gentleman.

"Fie! monseigneur," said Bussy to the Duc d'Anjou, "you ought to be ashamed of bringing us such an ugly phiz as that from your Government. Is he a sample of the sort of gentlemen your favor pitches on in the provinces? Devil take me if you find another like him in all Paris, which is a good-sized city and has its fair share of scarecrows. And he has a red beard also; I did not perceive it at first — it is an additional attraction. It is said, and I warn your Highness I did not believe a word of it, that you forced the King to make this fellow grand huntsman."

"M. de Monsoreau has served me well," said the prince, shortly, "and I reward him."

"Well spoken, monseigneur; such gratitude on the part of princes is only the more beautiful because it is so rare. But if that was your motive, I, too, monseigneur, have served you well, if I am not greatly mistaken, and I beg you to believe me when I state that I would wear the grand huntsman's jacket far more gracefully than that long-legged spectre."

"I never heard," answered the Duc d'Anjou, "that a person had to be an Apollo or an Antinous in order to fill an office at court."

"You never heard so, monseigneur?" said Bussy, in his coolest manner; "that is astonishing."

"I examine the heart, not the face," replied the prince; "the services that have been performed, not the services that have been promised."

"Your Highness must, I am afraid, think me very inquisitive," rejoined Bussy, "but I am really anxious to discover what service this Monsoreau has been able to do you."

"Ah! Bussy," said the prince, sharply, "you have just spoken the truth: you are very inquisitive, far too inquisitive, in fact."

"That is so like a prince!" went on Bussy, with his customary freedom; "princes will question you about anything and everything, and always insist on an answer: while if you question them on the most trifling point, you may be sure you'll get no reply."

"True," returned the Duc d'Anjou; "but do you know what you ought to do if you are anxious for information?"

"No."

"Go ask M. de Monsoreau himself."

"I see!" said Bussy; "upon my word, you're right, monseigneur, and, as he is a simple gentleman like myself, I have, at least, a remedy if he does not answer."

"Of what kind?"

"I'll tell him he's impertinent." And thereupon, turning his back on the prince, under the gaze of his friends, and hat in hand, he carelessly approached M. de Monsoreau, who, mounted in the middle of the circle, and the target for all eyes, was waiting with marvellous composure until the King should relieve him from the troublesome glances that fell on his person.

When he saw Bussy approach, gay and smiling, with hat in hand, his face brightened a little.

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Bussy, "but I see you are quite alone. Is it because the favor you now enjoy has already won you as many enemies as you may have had friends, a week ago, before you were appointed grand huntsman?"

"By my faith, M. le Comte," answered the Seigneur de Monsoreau, "I would not swear but that you are right: I would even make a wager on it. But might I know to what I am to attribute the honor you do me in coming to disturb me in my solitude?"

"Oh," said Bussy, boldly, "you owe it to the great admiration which the Duc d'Anjou has made me feel for you."

"How, pray?"

"By his account of the exploit that gained for you the office of grand huntsman."

M. de Monsoreau became so frightfully pale that the marks of the small-pox in his face turned to so many black points on his yellow skin. At the same time the look he gave Bussy foreboded a violent storm.

Bussy saw he had gone the wrong way about the matter; but he was not the sort of man that retreats; on the contrary, he was one of those who make up for being indiscreet by being insolent.

"You say, monsieur," answered the grand huntsman, "that Monseigneur has given you an account of my last exploit?"

"Yes, monsieur, and quite at length," said Bussy. "This it was, I confess, that made me long to hear the story from your own lips."

M. de Monsoreau clutched the spear convulsively, as if he felt violently inclined to use it as a weapon against Bussy.

"In good sooth, monsieur," said he, "I was quite willing to yield to your request, in recognition of your courtesy; but, unfortunately, as you see, the King is coming, and so I have not time; you will have the goodness, then, to adjourn the matter to another occasion."

Monsoreau was right; the King, mounted on his favorite steed, a handsome Spanish jennet of a light bay color, was galloping from the Castle to the Point Saint-Louis.

Bussy, looking round, encountered the eyes of the Duc d'Anjou; the prince was laughing, an evil smile on his face.

"Master and servant," thought Bussy, "have both an ugly grimace when they laugh; what must it be, then, when they weep?"

The King was fond of handsome, amiable faces; he was, therefore, anything but pleased with that of M. de Monsoreau, which he had seen once before, and which pleased him as little the second time as it had the first. Still, he accepted graciously enough the *estortuaire* with which Monsoreau presented him, kneeling, as was the custom.

As soon as the King was armed, the whippers-in announced that a stag was started, and the chase began.

Bussy had stationed himself on the flank of the party, so that every one might pass in front of him; he scrutinized the faces of the women, without exception, to see if he could not discover the original of the portrait; but it was all useless.

There were plenty of beautiful faces, plenty of captivating faces, at this hunt, where the grand huntsman was to make his first appearance: but not the charming face for which he sought.

He was compelled to put up with the conversation and company of his ordinary friends. Antragnet, gay and talkative as ever, was a source of great relief to him in his disappointment.

"That's a hideous grand huntsman we've got," he said to Bussy; "what do you think of him?"

"He's horrible; what a family he must have if the children who have the honor to belong to him are at all like him! Be good enough to show me his wife."

"The grand huntsman is still unmarried, my dear," replied Antragnet.

"How do you know that?"

"From Madame de Veudron, who thinks him very handsome, and would willingly make him her fourth spouse, as Lucretia Borgia did Count d'Este. Look! her bay is always just behind Monsoreau's black charger."

"What estate owns him as its lord?"

"Oh, he has any number of estates."

"Where?"

"Near Anjou."

"Then he's rich?"

"So I have been told; but he's nothing more; he belongs, it seems, to the lower class of nobles."

"And who is the mistress of this country squire?"

"He has none; the worthy gentleman has decided to be without a parallel among his fellows. But see, the Duc d'Anjou is beckoning to you; you had better go to him at once."

"Ah, faith, I'll let Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou wait. This man piques my curiosity. I think him a very singular person. I don't know why — you get this sort of ideas into your head, you know, the first time you meet people. I don't know why, but I expect to have a crow to pluck with this fellow, some time or other; and then, his name, Monsoreau!"

"*Mont de la Souris*."¹ returned Antragnet; "that's the etymology of it. My old abbé told me all about it this morning; '*Mons Soricis*.'"

"I accept the interpretation," answered Bussy.

¹ Mousehill.

"But — stay a moment, please," cried Antraguët, suddenly.

"Why?"

"Livarot knows something about it."

"About what?"

"Mons Soricis. They are neighbors."

"I say, Livarot! tell us all you know at once."

Livarot drew near.

"Come here quick, Livarot. What about Monsoreau?"

"Eh?" replied the young man.

"We want you to inform us about Monsoreau."

"With pleasure."

"Will the story be long?"

"No, very short; four or five words will be enough to tell you what I think and know of him: I'm afraid of him!"

"Good! and now that you have told us what you think, tell us what you know."

"Listen! I was returning, one night" —

"A terrible opening that," said Antraguët.

"Will you let me finish?"

"Go on."

"I was returning one night from a visit to my uncle D'Entragues, through the forest of Méridor, about six months ago, when suddenly I heard a frightful cry, and a white nag, with an empty saddle, rushed by me into the thicket. I pushed on as hard as I could, and, at the end of a long avenue, darkened by the shadows of night, I espied a man on a black horse; he was not galloping, he was flying. The same stifled cry was heard anew, and I was able to distinguish in front of his saddle the form of a woman and his hand pressed over her mouth. I had my hunting arquebuse with me, and you know I'm no bungler with it as a rule. I took aim, and, upon my soul, I should have killed him only that my match went out at the wrong moment."

"And then?" asked Bussy, "what happened next?"

"Next I asked a woodcutter who was the gentleman on the black horse that was kidnapping a woman? and he answered: 'M. de Monsoreau.'"

"Well," said Antraguët, "it is not so unusual a thing to carry off women, is it, Bussy?"

"Yes; but, at least, the women are allowed to scream."

"And who was the woman?" asked Antraguët.

"That is a thing I could never learn."

"I tell you," said Bussy, "this man is decidedly remarkable, and he interests me."

"However, this precious nobleman enjoys an abominable reputation," said Livarot.

"You have some other facts?"

"No, none. He never does evil openly, and is even rather kind to his tenants; but with all that, the dwellers in the district that has the good fortune to own him fear him like hell-fire; still, as he is a hunter like Nimrod, not before the Lord, perhaps, but before the devil, the King will never have a better grand huntsman; a far better one than Saint-Luc, for whom the post was first intended until the Duc d'Anjou interfered and choused him out of it."

"Do you know the Duc d'Anjou is still calling for you?" said Antragnet to Bussy.

"Good! let him go on calling; and, by the way, do you know what is being said about Saint-Luc?"

"No; is he still the King's prisoner?" asked Livarot, laughing.

"I suppose he must be," said Antragnet, "as he is not here."

"Quite wrong, my dear fellow; he started at one, last night, to visit his wife's estates."

"Exiled?"

"It looks that way."

"Saint-Luc exiled? Impossible."

"My dear, it's as true as the Gospel."

"According to *Saint Luke*?"

"No, according to Maréchal de Brissac, who told it me this morning with his own lips."

"Ah! that is a novel and interesting bit of news; I'm pretty sure this will do harm to our Monsoreau."

"I have it!" said Bussy.

"Have what?"

"I have hit on it."

"Hit on what?"

"The service he rendered M. d'Anjou."

"Saint-Luc?"

"No, Monsoreau."

"Really?"

"Yes, devil take me if I have n't! You'll see, you fellows; come along with me."



"I WAS ABLE TO DISTINGUISH IN FRONT OF HIS SADDLE THE FORM OF A WOMAN, AND HIS HAND PRESSED OVER HER MOUTH."



And Bussy, followed by Livarot and Antragnet, set his horse to a gallop and came up with the Duc d'Anjou, who, tired of making signs to him, was now a considerable distance away.

"Ah! monseigneur," he cried, "what a valuable man that M. de Monsoreau is!"

"You think so, do you?"

"I am amazed!"

"Then you spoke to him?" said the prince, with a sneer.

"Certainly, and I found him quite a refined person."

"And you asked him what he had done for me?" inquired the prince, with the same sneering laugh.

"Of course; it was for that purpose I accosted him."

"And he answered you?" said the prince, apparently gayer than ever.

"At once, and with a politeness for which I am infinitely obliged to him."

"And now let us hear his reply, my doughty braggadocio," said the Duc d'Anjou.

"He confessed, with all possible courtesy, that he was your Highness' purveyor."

"Purveyor of game?"

"No, purveyor of women."

"What do you mean?" said the prince, his face becoming dark as midnight in a moment. "What does this jesting signify, Bussy?"

"It means, monseigneur, that he kidnaps women for you on his big black steed, and that, as they are doubtless ignorant of the honor intended them, he claps his hand over their mouths to prevent them from screaming."

The prince frowned, wrung his hands convulsively in his rage, turned pale, and set his horse to so furious a gallop that Bussy and his comrades were soon left far behind.

"Aha! it seems to me the joke told," said Antragnet.

"And all the better because everybody does not seem to regard it as a joke," continued Livarot.

"The devil!" exclaimed Bussy; "it looks as if I had touched our good prince on the raw."

A moment later M. d'Anjou was heard shouting:

"I say, Bussy! Where are you? Come here, I say."

"Here I am, monseigneur," answered Bussy, drawing nigh.

The prince was in a fit of laughter.

"Upon my word, monseigneur," said Bussy, "what I have been telling you must have been awfully droll."

"No, Bussy, I am not laughing at what you told me."

"So much the worse: I should have been well pleased were that the case; it would be a great merit in me to make a prince laugh who laughs so seldom."

"I laugh, my poor Bussy, because you have invented a false story to find out the true one."

"No, monseigneur; devil take me if I have not told you the truth."

"Well, then, now that we are by ourselves, tell me your little story. Where did all that happen?"

"In the forest of Méridor, monseigneur."

This time the prince turned pale again, but he said nothing.

"Beyond a doubt," thought Bussy, "he has had some connection or other with the ravisher on the black horse and the woman to whom the white nag must have belonged."

"Come, monseigneur," added Bussy, laughing in his turn, now that the prince laughed no longer, "if there is a way of pleasing you better than any we have adopted hitherto, tell us about it: we'll have no scruple in choosing it, though we may have to enter into competition with M. de Monsoreau."

"Yes, by heavens, Bussy," said the Duc d'Anjou, "there is one, and I'll point it out to you!"

The prince led Bussy aside.

"Listen," said he. "I met a charming woman lately at church. Although she was veiled, certain features in her face reminded me of a woman with whom I was once in love; I followed her, found out where she lived, bribed her maid, and have a key of the house."

"Well, monseigneur, as far as I can see, everything is in your favor."

"But she is said to be a prude, although free, young, and beautiful."

"Oh! that staggers belief. Is not your Highness romancing?"

"Listen! You are brave and you love me, or, at least, say you do."

"I have my days."

"For being brave?"

"No, for loving you."

"Good! Is this one of your days?"

"I will try to make it one, if I can thereby serve your Highness."

"Well, then, I want you to do for me what most people do only for themselves."

"Indeed!" said Bussy; "perhaps your Highness wishes me to pay my court to your mistress in order to discover if she is as virtuous as she is beautiful? I have no objection."

"No, but to find out if some one else is not paying court to her."

"Ah, the thing is getting complicated; let us have an explanation, monseigneur."

"I would have you watch and find out who is the man that visits her."

"There is a man, then?"

"I'm afraid so."

"A lover, or a husband?"

"A jealous man, anyway."

"So much the better, monseigneur."

"Why so much the better?"

"It doubles your chances."

"You are very kind! In the meantime I should like to find out who the man is."

"And you would have me undertake the duty of informing you?"

"Yes, and if you consent to render me this service"—

"You'll make me the next chief huntsman when the post is vacant?"

"I assure you, Bussy, I should be the more inclined to do so from the fact that I have never really done anything for you."

"Ah! so monseigneur has discovered that at last!"

"I pledge you my word I have been saying it to myself ever so long."

"In a whisper, as princes are in the habit of saying this sort of things."

"And now?"

"What, monseigneur?"

"Do you consent?"

"To spy on a lady?"

"Yes."

"Monseigneur, I do not, I confess, feel at all flattered by such a commission. I should prefer another."

"You offered to do me a service, Bussy, and you are drawing back already."

"Zounds, monseigneur, you are asking me to be a spy!"

"No! to be a friend. Besides, don't fancy I am offering you a sinecure; you may have to draw your sword."

Bussy shook his head.

"Monseigneur," said he, "there are certain things a person only does well when he does them himself; this is a case where even a prince must act on his own account."

"Then you refuse?"

"Most assuredly I do, monseigneur."

The prince frowned.

"I will follow your counsel, then," said he. "I will go myself, and if I am killed or wounded, I shall say that I begged my friend Bussy to venture on receiving or returning a sword-thrust for my sake, and that, for the first time in his life, he was prudent."

"Monseigneur," answered Bussy, "you said yesterday evening: 'Bussy, I hate all those minions of the King's chamber, who never lose a chance of insulting and gibing at us; now I want you to go to Saint-Luc's wedding, pick a quarrel with them, and make short work of them, if you can.' Monseigneur, I went, and went alone; there were five of them; I challenged them; they lay in wait for me, attacked me in a body, killed my horse, yet I wounded two and knocked a third senseless. To-day you ask me to wrong a woman. Excuse me, monseigneur; that is not one of the services an honorable man can render his prince, and I refuse."

"Just as you like," said the prince. "I will watch myself, or in company with Aurilly, as I have done before."

"I beg your pardon," said Bussy, through whose mind a light was breaking.

"Why?"

"May I ask you were you watching also the other day when you saw the minions lying in wait for me?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then the fair unknown lives near the Bastile?"

"Yes, opposite the Rue Sainte-Catherine."

"You're sure?"

"Yes, and also that it is a cut-throat quarter, a fact of which you have had some experience yourself."

"And has your Highness been there since that evening?"

"Yes, yesterday."

"And you saw?"

"A man hiding in corners, doubtless to see if any one was spying on him. He afterward kept obstinately in front of the door, because he perceived me, I imagine."

"And was this man alone, monseigneur?"

"Yes, for nearly half an hour."

"And then?"

"Another man joined him, with a lantern."

"Ah, indeed!"

"After this, the man in the cloak" — continued the prince.

"So the first man had a cloak?" interrupted Bussy.

"Yes. Then the man in the cloak and the man with the lantern talked together, and as they seemed inclined to remain there the whole night, I left them and returned."

"Disgusted with your second experiment?"

"Faith, yes, I confess it — so that, before poking my head into a house that may be a den of murderers" —

"You would not object to have one of your friends murdered there?"

"Nay, not so — but rather that a friend who does not happen to be a prince and has not the same enemies I have, especially if he is accustomed to adventures of the kind, should take note of the sort of danger I am likely to run and inform me of it."

"In your place, monseigneur, I should give the woman up."

"No."

"Why?"

"She is too beautiful."

"You say yourself you have scarcely seen her."

"I saw enough to remark she had magnificent fair hair."

"Ah!"

"Two glorious eyes."

"Ah! Ah!"

"A complexion the like of which I have never seen; and her shape is a marvel."

"Ah! Ah! Ah!"

"You understand it is rather hard to give up such a woman."

"Yes, monseigneur, I understand; and so your position gives me real pain."

"You are jesting."

"No, and the proof of it is that, if your Highness give me your instructions and point out the door to me, I will watch it."

"You have changed your mind, then?"

"Egad! monseigneur, the only person who is infallible is our Holy Father Gregory XIII.; only tell me what is to be done?"

"You must hide some distance from the door I'll show you, and, if a man enter, follow him until you ascertain who he is."

"Yes, but what if he shut the door on me when he enters?"

"I told you I had a key."

"Ah, true; the only thing to be feared is that I might follow the wrong man and the key belong to another door."

"No danger of a mistake; this door leads into an alley; at the end of the alley, on the left, is a staircase; you go up twelve steps, and then you're in the corridor."

"How can you know that, monseigneur, since you were never in the house?"

"Did I not tell you the maid is in my pay? She explained everything to me."

"*Tudieu!* what a thing it is to be prince! he has everything ready to his hand. Why, if it had been my case, monseigneur, I should have had to discover the house, explore the alley, count the steps, and feel my way in the corridor. It would have taken me an enormous length of time, and who knows if I should have succeeded, after all!"

"So, then, you consent?"

"Could I refuse anything to your Highness? But you'll come with me to point out the door."

"Not necessary. When we return from the hunt, we'll go a little out of our way, pass Porte Saint-Antoine, and then I'll show it to you."

"Nothing could be better! And what am I to do to the man if he come?"

"Nothing but follow him until you learn who he is."

"It's a rather delicate matter. Suppose, for example, this man is so indiscreet as to halt in the middle of the road and bring my investigations to a standstill?"

"You are at full liberty to adopt whatever plan pleases you."

"Then your Highness authorizes me to act as I should do in my own case?"

"Exactly."

"I will do so, monseigneur."

"Not a word of this to any of our young gentlemen."

"My word of honor on it!"

"And you 'll set out on your exploration alone?"

"I swear it."

"Very well, all's settled; we shall return by the Bastile. I'll point out the door, you'll come home with me for the key — and to-night" —

"I take your Highness' place; it's a bargain."

Bussy and the prince then joined the hunt, which M. de Monsoreau was conducting like a man of genius. The King was delighted with the punctuality displayed by the huntsman in arranging all the halts and relays. After being chased two hours, turned into an enclosure of twelve or fifteen miles, and seen more than a score of times, the animal was come up with, just at the point where he started.

M. de Monsoreau was congratulated by the King and the Duc d'Anjou.

"Monseigneur," said he to the latter, "I am very glad you think me worthy of your compliments, since it is to you I owe my post."

"But you are aware, monsieur," said the prince, "that, in order to continue to merit them, you must start this evening for Fontainebleau. The King will hunt the day after to-morrow and the days following, and a day will certainly not be more than enough to enable you to become acquainted with the forest."

"I know it, monseigneur, and I have given my people notice already. I am prepared to start to-night."

"Ah, that's how it is, M. de Monsoreau!" said Bussy; "no more nights of rest for you. Well, you would be grand huntsman, and so you are. But the office you occupy entails the loss of fifty nights that other people have; it's a lucky thing for you you're not married, my dear M. de Monsoreau."

Bussy said this, laughing; the prince darted a piercing look at the grand huntsman; then turning round, he proceeded to congratulate the King on the evident improvement in his health since the night before.

As for Monsoreau, at the jest of Bussy he turned pale again, with that hideous paleness which gave him such a sinister aspect.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW BUSSY DISCOVERED BOTH PORTRAIT AND ORIGINAL.

THE hunt was over about four in the evening, and at five, as if the King wished to anticipate the desire of the Duc d'Anjou, the whole court returned to Paris by way of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine.

M. de Monsoreau, under the pretext that he must set out at once, had taken leave of the princes, and proceeded with his men in the direction of Fromenteau.

When the King passed in front of the Bastile, he called the attention of his friends to the stern, gloomy appearance of the fortress; it was his method of reminding them of what they might expect, if, after being his friends, they became his enemies.

Many understood the hint, and became more lavish than ever of their expressions of reverence for his Majesty.

During this time, the Duc d'Anjou whispered to Bussy, who was riding close to him:

"Look well, Bussy; you see the wooden house on the right, with a little statue of the Virgin in the gable; follow the same line with your eye and count four houses, that of the Virgin included."

"It's done," said Bussy.

"It is the fifth," said the prince, "the one just in front of the Rue Sainte-Catherine."

"I see it, monseigneur; stay, look yonder; at the blare of the trumpets announcing the King's approach, all the windows are crowded."

"Except those in the house I showed you," said the Duc d'Anjou; "they are closed."

"But one of the blinds is half open," answered Bussy, his heart beating terribly.

"Yes, but we can't see any one. Oh, the lady is well guarded, or else she guards herself! At all events, that is the house; I'll give you the key at the hôtel."

Bussy flashed a glance through the narrow opening, but, although his eyes were then riveted on it, he could perceive nothing.

When they reached the Hôtel d'Anjou, the prince gave

Bussy the key, as he had promised, cautioning him to watch carefully. Bussy said he would be answerable for everything, and went to his hôtel.

"Well?" he said to Rémy.

"The question I was about to ask you, monseigneur?"

"You have discovered nothing?"

"The house is as hard to find by day as by night. I'm in a regular quandary about the five or six houses near it."

"Then I fancy I have been luckier than you, my dear Le Hardouin."

"How is that, monseigneur? So you have been searching too?"

"No, I only passed through the street."

"And you recognized the door?"

"Providence, my dear friend, works in mysterious ways and is responsible for the most unforeseen results."

"Then you are quite certain?"

"I do not say I am quite certain, but I have hopes."

"And when shall I know you have been fortunate enough to have found the object of your search?"

"To-morrow morning."

"In the meantime, do you need me?"

"Not at all."

"You do not wish me to follow you?"

"That is impossible."

"Be prudent, at least, monseigneur."

"Oh, your advice is useless; I am well known to be so."

Bussy dined like a man who is not at all sure where he will get his supper; then, at eight, he selected his best sword, stuck a pair of pistols in his belt, in spite of the edict the King had just issued, and had himself carried in his litter to the end of the Rue Saint-Paul. There he recognized the house with the Virgin's statue, counted the next four houses, made certain the fifth was the house he wanted, and, wrapped in his long, dark cloak, crouched in an angle of the Rue Sainte-Catherine, with his mind made up to wait two hours, and then, if nobody came, to act on his own account.

It was striking nine at Saint Paul's when Bussy went into his hiding-place. He was there hardly ten minutes when he saw two horsemen advancing through the darkness by the Porte de la Bastille. They halted near the Hôtel des Tournelles. One alighted, flung the reins to the second, who, very likely,

was a lackey, and, after watching him and the two horses go back the way they had come, until he lost sight of them, he proceeded toward the house confided to the watchfulness of Bussy.

When the stranger was near the house he made a circuit, apparently with the intention of exploring the neighborhood. Then, sure that he was not observed, he approached the door and disappeared.

Bussy heard the noise made by the door closing behind him.

He waited a moment, fearing this mysterious personage might remain awhile on the watch behind the wicket; but, when a few minutes had slipped by, he advanced in turn, crossed the road, opened the door, and, taught by experience, shut it noiselessly.

Then he turned round; the wicket was on a level with his eye, and, in all probability, it was the very wicket through which he had reconnoitred Quélus.

But he had something else to do; this was not what had brought him here. He felt his way slowly, touching both sides of the alley, and at the end, on the left, he came upon the first step of the staircase.

Here he stopped for two reasons: first, because his legs were giving way under him from emotion; and secondly, because he heard a voice which said:

"Gertrude, inform your mistress I am here, and wish to enter."

The order was given in too imperious a tone to admit of refusal; in an instant Bussy heard the voice of the servant answering:

"Pass into the drawing-room, monsieur; madame will be with you in a moment."

Bussy then thought of the twelve steps Rény had counted; he did the same, and, at the end of his counting, found himself on the landing.

He recalled the corridor and the three doors, and advanced a few steps, holding in his breath and stretching out his hand, which came in contact with the first door, the one by which the unknown had entered. He went on again, found a second door, turned the key in the lock, and, shivering from head to foot, entered.

The room in which Bussy found himself was completely

dark, except in a corner, which was partially illuminated by the light in the drawing-room, a side door being open.

This light fell on the windows, — windows hung with tapestry! — the sight thrilled the young man's heart with ecstasy.

His eyes next turned to the ceiling; a part of it was also lit up by the same reflected beams, and he recognized some of the mythological figures he had seen before; he extended his hand — it touched the carved bed.

Doubt was no longer possible; he was again in the same chamber in which he had awakened on the night he received the wound to which he owed his hospitable reception.

Every fibre in his body thrilled anew when he touched that bed and inhaled the perfume that emanates from the couch of a young and beautiful woman.

Bussy hid behind the bed curtains and listened.

He heard in the adjoining apartments the impatient footsteps of the unknown, who paused at intervals, murmuring between his teeth:

“Is she never coming?”

At length a door opened — a door in the drawing-room seemingly parallel to the half-open door already mentioned. The floor creaked under the pressure of a small foot, the rustling of a silk dress reached Bussy's ears, and the young man heard a woman's voice, — a voice trembling at once with fear and scorn; it said:

“I am here, monsieur; what do you want with me now?”

“Oho!” thought Bussy, from behind his curtains, “if this man is the lover, I congratulate the husband.”

“Madame,” answered the man who was received in this freezing fashion, “I have the honor to inform you I must start for Fontainebleau to-morrow morning, and I have come to spend the night with you.”

“Do you bring me news of my father?” asked the same feminine voice.

“Listen to me, madame.”

“Monsieur, you know what was our agreement yesterday when I consented to become your wife; it was that, first of all, either my father should come to Paris or I should go to my father.”

“Madame, we will start immediately after my return from Fontainebleau. I pledge you my word of honor. In the meantime” —

“Oh, monsieur, do not close that door, it is useless. I will not spend a single night, no, not a single night, under the same roof with you until I am reassured as to my father's fate.”

And the woman who spoke so resolutely blew a little silver whistle which gave a shrill, protracted sound.

This was the method adopted for summoning servants in an age when bells had not been yet invented for domestic purposes.

At the same moment, the door through which Bussy had entered again opened and the young woman's maid appeared on the scene. She was a tall, robust daughter of Anjou, had been apparently on the watch for her mistress' summons, and had hurried to obey it as soon as heard.

After entering the drawing-room, she opened the door that had been shut.

A stream of light then flowed into the chamber where Bussy was stationed, and he recognized the portrait between the two windows.

“Gertrude,” said the lady, “do not go to bed, and remain always within sound of my voice.”

The maid withdrew by the way she had entered, without uttering a word, leaving the door of the drawing-room wide open, so that the wonderful portrait was entirely illuminated.

This placed the matter beyond all question in Bussy's eyes: the portrait was the one he had seen before.

He advanced softly to peep through the opening between the hinges of the door and the wall, but, soft as was his tread, just at the very moment he was able to look into the apartment, the floor creaked.

The lady heard it and turned: the original of the portrait! the fairy of his dream!

The man, although he had heard nothing, turned when the lady did.

It was the Seigneur de Monsoreau!

“Ha!” muttered Bussy, “the white nag—the kidnapped woman. I am assuredly on the point of listening to some terrible story.”

And he wiped his face, which had become suddenly covered with perspiration.

Bussy, as we have stated, saw them both: the one standing, pale and scornful; the other seated, not so much pale as livid, moving his foot impatiently and biting his hand.

"Madame," said he, at length, "it is nearly time for you to give up acting the part of a persecuted woman, a victim; you are in Paris, you are in my house, and, moreover, you are now the Comtesse de Monsoreau, and that means you are my wife."

"If I am your wife, why refuse to lead me to my father? why continue to hide me from the eyes of the world?"

"Have you forgotten the Duc d'Anjou, madame?"

"You assured me that, once I was your wife, I had nothing to fear from him."

"Of course, but" —

"That is what you assured me."

"Undoubtedly, madame, but still it may be necessary to take certain precautions."

"Well, monsieur, take your precautions, and return when you have taken them."

"Diane," said the count, whose heart was visibly swelling with anger, "Diane, do not make sport of the sacred marriage tie. You would do well to take my advice in that regard."

"Prove to me, monsieur, that I have no reason to distrust my husband and I will respect the marriage!"

"And yet it seems to me the manner in which I have acted toward you might induce you to trust me."

"Monsieur, I think that, throughout this whole affair, my interest has not been your sole motive, or, even if it has, chance has done you good service."

"Ah, this is too much!" cried the count. "I am in my own house, you are my wife, and, though all hell should come to your aid, to-night you shall be mine."

Bussy laid his hand on his sword and took a step forward; but Diane did not give him time to appear.

"Hold!" said she, drawing a poniard from her girdle; "this is my answer."

And bounding into the room where Bussy was standing, she shut the door, double bolted it, and, while Monsoreau was striking it with his clenched fist and shouting empty threats, Diane said to him:

"Break but a particle of this door, monsieur, and — you know me! — you will find me dead on the threshold!"

"And have courage, madame," said Bussy, enfolding her in his arms, "you would have an avenger."

Diane was near crying out; but she felt that the only peril threatening her came from her husband. She remained, there-

fore, on the defensive, but dumb; trembling, but motionless. M. de Monsoreau kicked the door violently; then, evidently convinced that Diane would execute her threat, he left the drawing-room, slamming the door behind him. Next was heard the sound of footsteps in the corridor, growing gradually fainter, until it died away on the staircase.

"But you, monsieur," said Diane, when there was silence, and she had freed herself from Bussy's embrace and retreated a step, "who are you and how is it you are here?"

"Madame," said Bussy, opening the door and kneeling before Diane, "I am the man whose life you saved. Surely you cannot believe I have entered your room with evil intent or have formed any design against your honor?"

Thanks to the flood of light that now bathed the young man's noble face, Diane recognized him.

"You here, monsieur!" she cried, clasping her hands; "then you have heard everything!"

"Alas! yes, madame."

"But who are you? Your name, monsieur?"

"Madame, I am Louis de Clermont, Comte de Bussy."

"Bussy? you are the brave Bussy?" Diane cried, naïvely, without thought of the delight with which this exclamation filled the young man's heart. "Ah! Gertrude," she continued, addressing her maid, who ran in, quite terrified at hearing her mistress speaking to somebody, — "Gertrude, I have no longer anything to fear; from this moment my honor is under the safeguard of the most noble and loyal gentleman in France."

Then, holding out her hand to Bussy:

"Rise, monsieur," said she, "I know who you are; it is right you should know who I am."

CHAPTER XIII.

WHO DIANE DE MÉRIDOR WAS.

Bussy rose, entirely dazed by his happiness, and he and Diane entered the drawing-room which M. de Monsoreau had just quitted.

He gazed on Diane with mingled amazement and admiration. He had not dared to believe that the woman he had

sought could bear any comparison with the woman of his dream, and now the reality surpassed all that he had taken for a delusion of his imagination.

Diane was about eighteen or nineteen years old, and that is the same as saying she was in that splendid dawn of youth and beauty which gives to the flower its purest coloring, to the fruit its softest tints; there was no mistaking the expression of Bussy's look; Diane saw that she was admired, and had not the strength to interrupt the ecstasy of Bussy.

At length she perceived the necessity of breaking a silence which spoke too eloquently.

"Monsieur," said she, "you answered one of my questions, but not the other. I asked you who you were, and you told me; but I asked also how you came here, and that question you have not answered."

"Madame," answered Bussy, "I understood from the few words I heard during your conversation with M. de Monsoreau that my presence here had a natural connection with the events in your life you have graciously promised to relate to me. Have you not just told me you would let me know who you were?"

"Yes, count, I will tell you all," replied Diane. "I have often heard you spoken of as a man in whose courage, honor, and loyalty the most implicit confidence could be placed."

Bussy bowed.

"From the little you heard," continued Diane, "you must have learned that I was the daughter of Baron de Méridor, which means that I am the sole heiress of one of the oldest and noblest names in Anjou."

"There was a Baron de Méridor at Pavia," said Bussy, "who, though he might have escaped, surrendered his sword to the Spaniards when he knew his king was a prisoner; then he begged as a favor to be allowed to follow François I. into captivity at Madrid, and only left him after being commissioned to negotiate his ransom."

"He was my father, monsieur, and, if you ever enter the grand hall in the Castle of Méridor, you will see the portrait of François I., painted by Leonardo da Vinci and presented by the king in recognition of this devotion."

"Ah!" said Bussy, "in those times princes knew how to reward their servants."

"After his return from Spain my father married. His first

two children, sons, died. This was a great grief to the Baron de Méridor, who lost all hope of seeing his house continue in the male line. Soon after, the king died also, and the baron's sorrow turned to despair; he remained only a couple of years at court, and then shut himself up with his wife in the Castle of Méridor. It was there I was born, almost by a miracle, ten years after the death of my brothers.

"All the baron's love was now concentrated on the child of his old age; his affection for me was more than tenderness, it was idolatry. Three years after my birth, I lost my mother; it was a new affliction for my father; but I, too young to understand my loss, continued to smile, and my smiles consoled him.

"I grew up and developed under his eyes. Just as I was all to him, so he was all to me. Poor father! I reached my sixteenth year without suspecting the existence of any other world except that of my sheep, my peacocks, my swans, and doves, without dreaming that this life would ever end or wishing that it should.

"The Castle of Méridor was surrounded by vast forests belonging to the Duc d'Anjou; these forests were full of all kinds of deer, which were allowed to range undisturbed and had become quite tame in consequence; all were more or less friendly with me, some being so accustomed to my voice that they ran up whenever I called them; but my favorite among them was a doe — my poor, poor Daphne! — that would come and eat out of my hands.

"One spring, I did not see her for a month, and I believed her lost; I wept for her as I would have wept for a friend, when she suddenly made her appearance, followed by two little fawns; the poor things were at first afraid of me, but when the mother caressed my hand they felt they need not fear, and caressed in their turn.

"About this time the report spread that the Duc d'Anjou had appointed a deputy-governor over his province. Some days later it was learned that this deputy had arrived and was called the Comte de Monsoreau.

"Why did that name strike me to the heart the moment I heard it uttered? My only explanation of that painful sensation is that it was a presentiment.

"A week slipped by. The opinions expressed in the country about M. de Monsoreau were very emphatic and very different.

One morning the woods reëchoed to the sounds of horns and the baying of dogs. I ran to the park grating, and arrived just in time to see Daphne pass like a flash of lightning, pursued by a pack of hounds; her two fawns followed. An instant after, a man flew by mounted on a black steed that seemed to have wings; it was M. de Monsoreau.

"I cried aloud; I entreated mercy for my poor favorite; but he either did not hear my voice or paid no attention to it, so much was he engrossed by the ardor of the chase.

"Then, not thinking of the anxiety I was sure to cause my father if he noticed my absence, I ran in the direction the hunt had taken. I hoped to meet either the count or some of his people, and beseech them to stop this pursuit, which was breaking my heart.

"I ran about half a league without knowing where I was going; I had long lost sight of everything: doe, hounds, and hunters; soon I did not even hear the baying. I sank down at the foot of a tree and burst into tears. I remained there about a quarter of an hour, when I thought I could again distinguish in the distance the shouts of the hunters. I was not mistaken; the noise drew nearer and nearer, and was soon so loud that I became sure the hunt would pass by me in a moment. I rose at once and started in the direction from which I heard the cries.

"Nor was it long before I saw my poor Daphne speeding through a clearing; she was panting and had but a single fawn with her; the other, being tired out, had doubtless been torn to pieces by the hounds.

"The poor doe was visibly growing exhausted; the distance between her and her pursuers was less than at first; her running had changed to abrupt springs, and, when going by me, she belled dolefully.

"As before, I made vain efforts to make myself heard. M. de Monsoreau saw nothing but the animal he was pursuing. He flashed by even more quickly than the first time, sounding furiously the horn he held to his lips.

"Behind him, three or four whippers-in cheered on the hounds with horns and shouts. This whirlwind of barks and flourishes and cries passed like a tempest, vanished into the depths of the forest, and died away in the distance.

"I felt desperate; I said to myself that had I been only fifty yards farther, just at the edge of the clearing he had

crossed, he would have seen me, and would undoubtedly have saved the life of the poor animal on my intercession.

"This thought revived my courage: the hunt might pass a third time within view of me. I followed a path, with a line of beautiful trees on each side of it, which I knew led to the Castle of Beaugé. This castle belonged to the Duc d'Anjou, and was nearly nine miles from that of my father. The moment I saw it, it struck me I must have walked and run about nine miles, that I was alone and very far from home.

"I confess I felt a vague terror, and then only did I think of the imprudence and even impropriety of my conduct. I followed the edge of the pond, intending to ask the gardener, an excellent man, who used to present me a magnificent bouquet whenever I went there with my father, to act as my guide, when suddenly the shouts of hunters and baying of hounds struck on my ear again. I stood still and listened. The noise grew louder. I forgot everything. Almost at this very moment the doe bounded out of the wood on the other side of the pond, with the hounds nearly at her heels. She was alone — her second fawn had now been killed; the sight of the water seemed to renew her strength; she sucked in the cool air through her nostrils, and leaped into the pond, as if she wanted to come to me.

"At first she swam rapidly, as if she had recovered all her energy. I gazed on her, my eyes full of tears, my arms outstretched, and almost gasping like herself. But gradually she became exhausted, while the dogs, on the contrary, incited by the quarry that was now so near them, seemed more vigorous than ever. Soon the nearest hounds were within reach of her, and, stopped by their bites, she ceased swimming. At that moment M. de Monsoreau appeared on the outskirts of the wood, galloped up to the pond and jumped from his horse. Then collecting all my strength, I clasped my hands and cried out: 'Mercy!' Apparently, he saw me. I shouted again and louder than before. He heard me, for he raised his head. Then he ran down to a boat, unmoored it, and rowed quickly toward the animal, which was now struggling in the middle of the entire pack. I had not the least doubt that, touched by the sound of my voice, my entreaties and my gestures, he was hurrying to save her, when, as soon as he was within reach of Daphne, he quickly drew his hunting-knife; a sunbeam flashed upon the blade, then disappeared; I uttered a cry, the steel was

plunged into the poor beast's throat up to the handle. A stream of blood spurted out and dyed the waters of the pond crimson. The doe belled piteously, beat the water with her feet, rose for a moment, and fell back, dead.

"With a cry that was almost as agonizing as her own, I sank in a swoon on the slope of the pond.

"When I regained consciousness, I was lying in a chamber of the Castle of Beaugé, and my father, who had been sent for, was weeping by my pillow.

"As all that ailed me was a nervous attack produced by over-excitement, I was able to return to Méridor the next day. However, I had to keep my room for three or four days.

"On the fourth, my father told me that, while I was indisposed, M. de Monsoreau, who had seen me at the moment I was carried to the castle in a faint, had come to inquire after me; he was in despair when he learned he was the involuntary cause of my accident, and had asked to be permitted to offer his apologies, saying he could never be happy until he heard his pardon from my own lips.

"It would have been ridiculous to refuse him an interview; so, in spite of my repugnance, I yielded.

"The next day he presented himself. I had come to see the absurdity of my position; hunting is a pleasure which even women often share. I saw I must defend myself on account of an emotion that must have seemed nonsensical, and I made the affection I felt for Daphne my excuse.

"It was then the count's turn to affect compunction. He swore upon his honor, a score of times, that if he had had the slightest notion of the interest I took in his victim, he would have spared her with the greatest pleasure. But his protestations did not convince me, and he left without effacing from my heart the painful impression he had stamped upon it.

"Before retiring, the count asked my father's permission to return. He had been born in Spain and educated at Madrid, and it gave my father the greatest pleasure to talk with him of a country in which he had lived so long. Besides, as M. de Monsoreau was of gentle birth, deputy-governor of our province, and a favorite, it was said, of the Duc d'Anjou, there was no reason why he should not receive his request.

"Alas! from that moment my tranquillity, if not my happiness, was at an end. I soon perceived the impression I had made on the count. At first he came but once a week, then

twice, then every day. My father, to whom he showed the utmost respect, liked him. I saw with what pleasure the baron listened to his conversation, which was always that of a singularly able man. I did not venture to complain; and of what could I have complained? The count, while paying me all the courteous attentions of a lover, was as respectful as if I had been his sister.

“One morning my father entered my chamber, looking graver than usual, but there was an air of satisfaction blended with his gravity.

“‘My child,’ said he, ‘you have always assured me that you would never like to leave me!’

“‘Ah! father, are you not aware that it is my fondest desire to be with you forever?’

“‘Well, my own Diane,’ he continued, stooping to kiss me, ‘it depends entirely on yourself whether that desire shall be realized or not.’

“I suspected what he was about to say, and I turned so frightfully pale that he paused before touching my forehead with his lips.

“‘Diane, my child! Good heavens! what is the matter?’

“‘It is M. de Monsoreau, is it not?’ I stammered.

“‘And supposing it is?’ he asked, in amazement.

“‘Oh, never, father! if you have any pity for your daughter, never!’

“‘Diane, my darling, it is not pity I have for you, it is idolatry, as you well know; take a week to reflect and, if in a week’ —

“‘Oh, no, no,’ I cried, ‘it is needless, — not a week, not twenty-four hours, not a minute. No, no; oh, no!’

“And I burst into tears.

“My father worshipped me; he had never seen me weep before: he took me in his arms, and, with a few words, set me at my ease; he pledged his word of honor he would never again speak of this marriage.

“And now a month slipped by, during which I neither saw nor heard anything of M. de Monsoreau. One morning my father and I received an invitation to a great festival the count was to give in honor of the King’s brother, who was about to visit the province from which he took his title. The festival was to be held in the town hall of Angers.

“With this letter came a personal invitation from the prince,

who wrote that he remembered having seen my father formerly at the court of King Henri, and would be pleased to meet him again.

“My first impulse was to entreat my father to decline, and I should certainly have persisted in my opposition if we had been invited by M. de Monsoreau alone; but my father feared a refusal of the prince’s invitation might be viewed by his Highness as a mark of disrespect.

“We went to the festival, then. M. de Monsoreau received us as if nothing had passed between us; his conduct in my regard was neither indifferent nor affected; he treated me just as he did the other ladies, and it gave me pleasure to find I was neither the object of his friendliness nor of his enmity.

“But this was not the case with the Due d’Anjou. As soon as he saw me his eyes were riveted on me and never left me the rest of the evening. I felt ill at ease under his gaze, and, without letting my father know my reason for wishing to retire from the ball, I urged him so strongly that we were the first to withdraw.

“Three days later, M. de Monsoreau came to Méridor. I saw him at a distance coming up the avenue to the castle, and retired to my chamber.

“I was afraid my father might summon me; but he did nothing of the kind, and, after half an hour, M. de Monsoreau left. No one had informed me of his visit, and my father never spoke of it; but I noticed that he was gloomier than usual after the departure of the deputy-governor.

“Some days passed. One morning, after returning from a walk in the grounds, I was told M. de Monsoreau was with my father. The baron had inquired for me two or three times, and on each occasion seemed to be specially anxious as to the direction I had taken. He gave orders that my return should be at once announced to him.

“And, in fact, I was hardly in my room when my father entered.

“‘My child,’ said he, ‘a motive which it is unnecessary you should be acquainted with compels me to send you away for a few days. Ask no questions; you must be sure that my motive must be very urgent, since it forces me to remain a week, a fortnight, perhaps even a month, without seeing you.’

“I shuddered, although unconscious of the danger to which

I was exposed. But these two visits of M. de Monsoreau foreboded nothing good.

“ ‘But where am I to go, father?’ I asked.

“ ‘To the Castle of Lude, to my sister, who will conceal you from every eye. It is necessary that the journey be made at night.’

“ ‘Do you go with me?’

“ ‘No, I must stay here to divert suspicion; even the servants must not know where you are going.’

“ ‘But who are to be my escort?’

“ ‘Two men upon whom I can rely.’

“ ‘Oh, heavens! But father’ —

“ ‘The baron kissed me.

“ ‘My child,’ said he, ‘it cannot be helped.’

“I was so assured of my father’s love that I made no further objection and asked for no explanation.

“It was agreed between us that Gertrude, my nurse’s daughter, should accompany me.

“My father retired, after bidding me get ready.

“We were in the long days of winter, and it was a very cold and dreary evening; at eight o’clock my father came for me. I was ready, as he had directed; we went downstairs noiselessly and crossed the garden; he opened a little door that led into the forest; there we found a litter waiting and two men. My father talked to them at length, apparently enjoining them to take great care of me. After this, I took my place in the litter, and Gertrude sat down beside me. The baron kissed me for the last time, and we started.

“I was ignorant of the nature of the peril that threatened me and forced me to leave the Castle of Méridor. I questioned Gertrude, but she was quite as much in the dark as I was. I did not dare to ask information of my conductors, whom I did not know. We went along quietly by roundabout and devious paths, when, after travelling nearly two hours, at the very moment I was falling asleep, in spite of my anxiety, lulled by the smooth, monotonous motion of the litter, I was awakened by Gertrude, who seized me by the arm, as well as by the sudden stopping of the litter itself.

“ ‘Oh, mademoiselle!’ cried the poor girl; ‘what is happening?’

“I passed my head through the curtains; we were sur-

rounded by six masked men on horseback ; our own men, who had tried to defend us, were prisoners.

“ I was too frightened to call for help ; besides, who would have answered my appeal ? The man who appeared to be the leader of the band advanced to the litter.

“ ‘ Do not be alarmed, mademoiselle,’ said he ; ‘ no harm is intended you, but you must follow us.’

“ ‘ Where ? ’ I asked.

“ ‘ To a place where, so far from having any cause for fear, you will be treated as a queen.’

“ This promise frightened me more than if he had threatened me.

“ ‘ My father ! oh, my father ! ’ I murmured.

“ ‘ Hear me, mademoiselle,’ whispered Gertrude. ‘ I am acquainted with this neighborhood ; you know I am devoted to you. I am strong ; some misfortune will befall us if we do not escape.’

“ The encouragement my poor maid was trying to give me was far from reassuring me. Still, it is comforting to know you have a friend when in trouble, and I felt a little relieved.

“ ‘ Do as you like, gentlemen,’ I answered, ‘ we are only two poor women and cannot resist.’

“ One of the men dismounted, took the place of our conductor, and changed the direction of the litter.”

It may be easily understood with what profound attention Bussy listened to the narrative of Diane. The first emotions that inspire the dawning of a great love take the shape of an almost religious reverence for the beloved object. The woman the heart has chosen is raised by this very choice above others of her sex ; she expands, becomes ethereal, divine ; every one of her gestures is a favor she grants you, every one of her words a grace she bestows on you ; does she look at you, you are delighted ; does she smile on you, you are in ecstasy.

The young man had, therefore, allowed the fair speaker to unfold the story of her life, without daring to arrest it, without thought of interrupting it ; not a single detail of that life, over which he felt he should be called upon to watch, but had a potent interest for him, and he listened to Diane’s words, dumb, breathless, as if his very existence depended on catching every syllable.

So, when the young woman paused for a moment, doubtless

weakened by the twofold emotion she also experienced, an emotion in which all the memories of the past were blended with the present, Bussy had not strength to curb his anxiety, and, clasping his hands, he said :

“ Oh, madame ! continue.”

It was impossible for Diane to doubt of the interest she inspired : everything in the young man's voice, gesture, and in the expression of his face, was in harmony with the entreaty his words contained. Diane smiled sadly, and resumed :

“ We travelled nearly three hours ; then the litter halted ; I heard a door opening ; some words were exchanged ; the litter went on again, and, from the echoes that struck my ear, I concluded we were crossing a drawbridge. I was not mistaken ; glancing through the curtains, I saw we were in the courtyard of a castle.

“ What castle was it ? Neither Gertrude nor I could tell. We had often tried during the journey to find in what direction we were going, but all we were able to perceive was an endless forest. Both of us believed that the paths selected by our abductors were purposely circuitous, and designed to deprive us of any knowledge of where we were.

“ The door of our litter was opened and we were invited to alight by the same man that had spoken before.

“ I obeyed in silence. Two men, doubtless belonging to the castle, came with torches to receive us. In accordance with the alarming promise given to us before, we were treated with the greatest respect. We followed the men with the torches, and were conducted into a richly furnished bed-chamber, which had seemingly been furnished during the most elegant and brilliant period of the reign of François I.

“ A collation awaited us on a table sumptuously laid out.

“ ‘ You are at home, madame,’ said the man who had already addressed me twice, ‘ and as, of course, you require the services of a maid, yours will not leave ; her room is next to your own.’

“ Gertrude and I exchanged a look of relief.

“ ‘ Every time you want anything,’ continued the masked man, ‘ all you have to do is to strike the knocker of this door, and the man who is always on duty in the ante-chamber will be at your orders.’

“ This apparent attention indicated that we would be kept in sight.

"The masked man bowed and passed out, and we heard him double lock the door behind him.

"And now we were alone, Gertrude and I.

"For a moment we did not stir, but gazed into each other's eyes by the glare of the two candelabra which lit up the supper table. Gertrude wished to speak; I made her a sign to be silent; some one, perhaps, was listening.

"The door of the room appointed for Gertrude was open; the same idea of visiting it occurred to both of us. She seized one of the candelabra, and we entered on tiptoe.

"It was a large closet, evidently designed to serve as a dressing-room to the bed-chamber. It had another door, parallel to the one by which we had entered. This door was ornamented likewise with a little chiselled knocker of copper, which fell on a plate of the same metal, the whole so exquisitely wrought that it might have been the work of Benvenuto Cellini.

"It was evident both doors opened into the same ante-chamber.

"Gertrude brought the light close to the lock. The door was double-locked.

"We were prisoners.

"When two persons, though of different rank, are in the same situation and are partakers of the same perils, it is marvellous how quickly their ideas chime in together and how easily they pass beyond conventional phrases and useless words.

"Gertrude approached me.

"*'Mademoiselle,'* she said in a low voice, *'did you notice that, after we left the yard, we mounted only five steps?'*

"*'Yes,'* I answered.

"*'Then we are on the ground floor?'*

"*'Certainly.'*

"*'So that,'* she added, speaking still lower, and fastening her eyes on the outside shutters, *'so that'—*

"*'If these windows had no gratings'—* I interrupted.

"*'Yes, and if madame had courage'—*

"*'Courage!'* I cried; *'oh, rest easy, I'll have plenty of it, my child.'*

"It was now Gertrude's turn to warn me to be silent.

"*'Yes, yes, I understand,'* said I.

"Gertrude made me a sign to stay where I was, and returned to the bed-chamber with the candelabrum.

"I had known already her meaning, and I went to the window and felt for the fastenings of the shutters.

"I found them, or rather Gertrude did, and the shutters opened.

"I uttered an exclamation of joy; the window was not grated.

"But Gertrude had already noticed the cause of this seeming negligence of our jailers; a large pond bathed the foot of the wall; we were much better guarded by ten feet of water than we certainly could have been by grating on our windows.

"However, on raising my eyes from the pond to the bank that enclosed it, I recognized a landscape that was familiar to me: we were prisoners in the Castle of Beaugé, where, as I have said before, I had often come with my father, and where I had been carried the day of my poor Daphne's death.

"The Castle of Beaugé belonged to the Duc d'Anjou.

"Then, as if a lightning flash had illumined my mind, I understood everything.

"I gazed down into the water with gloomy satisfaction: it would be a last resource against violence, a last refuge from dishonor.

"Twenty times during that night did I start up, a prey to unspeakable terrors; but nothing justified these terrors except the situation in which I was placed; nothing indicated that any one intended me harm; on the contrary, the whole castle seemed sunk in sleep, and only the cries of the birds in the marshes disturbed the silence of the night.

"Daylight appeared, but though it dispelled the menacing aspect which darkness lends to the landscape, it but confirmed me in my fears during the night: flight was impossible without external aid, and where could such aid come from?

"About nine there was a knock at our door; I passed into the room of Gertrude, telling her she might allow the persons who knocked to enter.

"Those who knocked, as I could see from the closet, were the servants of the night before: they removed the supper, which we had not touched, and brought in breakfast.

"Gertrude asked a few questions, but they passed out leaving them unanswered.

"Then I returned. The reason of my presence in the Castle of Beaugé and of the pretended respect by which I was surrounded was explained. The Duc d'Anjou had seen me at the

festival given by M. de Monsoreau; the Duc d'Anjou had fallen in love with me; my father, on learning of it, wished to save me from the pursuit of which I was doubtless to be the object. He had removed me from Méridor; but, betrayed by a treacherous servant, or by an unfortunate accident, he had failed, and I had fallen into the hands of the man from whom he had vainly tried to deliver me.

“I dwelt upon this explanation, the only one that was probable, and, in fact, the only one that was true.

“Yielding to the entreaties of Gertrude, I drank a cup of milk and ate a bit of bread.

“The morning passed in the discussion of wild plans of escape. About a hundred yards from us we could see a boat among the reeds with its oars; assuredly, if that boat had been within reach of us, my strength, intensified by my terror, would have sufficed, along with the natural strength of Gertrude, to extricate us from our captivity.

“During this morning nothing occurred to alarm us. Dinner was served just as breakfast had been; I could hardly stand, I felt so weak. I sat down at table, waited on only by Gertrude, for our guardians retired as soon as they had placed the food on the table. But, just when I broke my loaf, I found a note inside of it. I opened it hurriedly; it contained but these few words:

“‘A friend is watching over you; you shall have news of him to-morrow, and of your father.’

“You can understand my joy; my heart beat as if it would burst through my breast. I showed Gertrude the note. The rest of the day was spent in waiting and hoping.

“The second night slipped by as quietly as the first; then came the hour of breakfast, for which we had watched so impatiently; for I was sure I should find another note in my loaf.

“I was not mistaken. The note was in these terms:

“‘The person who carried you off is coming to the Castle of Beaugé at ten o'clock to-night; but at nine, the friend who is watching over you will be under your window with a letter from your father, which will inspire you with that confidence in him which, perhaps, you might not otherwise feel.

“‘Burn this note.’

“I read this letter a second time and then threw it into the fire as I had been warned to do. The writing was completely

unknown to me, and I confess I was ignorant where it came from.

“Gertrude and I were lost in conjectures; we went to the window during the morning at least a hundred times in hope of seeing some one on the shore of the pond or in the depths of the forest; but we saw nothing.

“An hour after dinner some one knocked at the door; it was the first time any one had attempted to come into our room except at meal-time: however, as we had no means of locking ourselves in, we were forced to tell the person he might enter.

“It was the same man who had spoken to us at the litter and in the courtyard of the castle. I could not recognize him by his face, for he was masked at the time; but, at the first words he uttered, I recognized him by his voice.

“He presented a letter.

“‘Whom do you come from, monsieur?’ I asked.

“‘Have the goodness to read this letter, mademoiselle,’ said he, ‘and you will see.’

“‘But I will not read the letter until I know from whom it comes.’

“‘Mademoiselle, you are your own mistress. My orders were to hand you this letter. I shall lay it at your feet, and, if you deign to pick it up, you can do so.’

“And the servant, who was apparently an equerry, to make good his words, placed the letter on the cushion upon which I rested my feet, and passed out.

“‘What is to be done?’ I asked Gertrude.

“‘The advice I should take the liberty of offering, mademoiselle, would be to open this letter. It may warn us against some peril, and we may be the better prepared to escape it.’

“The advice was reasonable; I abandoned my first intention, and opened the letter.”

At this point Diane paused, rose up, opened a little piece of furniture to which we still give its Italian name of *stipppo*, and took a letter from a portfolio.

Bussy looked hastily at the address.

“To the beautiful Diane de Méridor,” he read.

Then, looking at the young woman:

“This address,” said he, “is in the Duc d’Anjou’s hand.”

“Ah!” she answered, with a sigh, “then he did not deceive me.”

As Bussy was hesitating about opening the letter:

"Read," said she; "chance has connected you with the most particular events of my life, and I can no longer keep anything secret from you."

Bussy obeyed and read:

"An unhappy prince, stricken to the heart by your divine beauty, will visit you to-night at ten to excuse himself for his conduct in your regard, conduct which he well knows can have no other excuse except the invincible love he feels for you.

"François."

"So this letter was undoubtedly written by the Duc d'Anjou?" asked Diane.

"Alas! yes," answered Bussy, "it is his hand and seal."

Diane sighed.

"What if he were less guilty than I believed?" she murmured.

"Who, the prince?" inquired Bussy.

"No, the Comte de Monsoreau."

It was now Bussy's turn to sigh.

"Continue, madame," said he, "and then we can form a judgment of the prince and the count."

"This letter, which I had no reason at the time for believing not genuine, since it tallied so well with my apprehensions, proved, as Gertrude had foreseen, the dangers to which I was exposed, and rendered all the more precious the intervention of the unknown friend who offered his aid in my father's name. My sole trust was, therefore, now in him.

"We watched at the window more eagerly than ever. Gertrude and I hardly ever took our eye away from the pond and the part of the forest opposite our apartments. But, as far as our vision could reach, we saw nothing that was likely to befriend or aid our hopes.

"Night came at last; however, we were in January, when night comes early, and four or five hours still separated us from the decisive moment; we waited it anxiously.

"It was one of those beautiful, frosty nights during which, were it not for the cold, you would believe it was the end of spring or the beginning of autumn; the sky gleamed with thousands of stars, and the crescent moon lit up the landscape with her silvery beams; we opened the window in Gertrude's room, knowing that it was likely to be less carefully watched than mine.

"About seven, a slight mist arose from the pond; but this

mist resembled a veil of transparent gauze, and did not hinder us from seeing, or rather our eyes had grown accustomed to the darkness and were able to pierce the mist.

"As we had no way of measuring the time, we could not well tell the hour. At last, we thought we saw through this transparent obscurity shadows moving among the trees on the outskirts of the wood. These shadows seemed to be advancing cautiously, keeping under the trees, as if they felt safest where the darkness was thickest. We might, perhaps, have come to the conclusion that these shadows were but illusions created by our wearied eyes, when the neighing of a horse came to our ears.

"*'They are our friends,'* murmured Gertrude.

"*'Or the prince,'* I answered.

"*'Oh, the prince,'* said she, *'the prince would not hide.'*

"This simple reflection banished my suspicions and reassured us.

"We now fixed all our thoughts on the scene before us.

"A man came forward; he was alone, having, as far as I could see, separated from a group of men sheltered under a clump of trees. He walked straight to the boat, unmoored it, and, getting in, rowed silently toward us.

"The nearer he was to us, the greater were my efforts to pierce the obscurity.

"From the first, there was something about the man that led me to think of the tall figure, the gloomy countenance, and the strongly marked features of the Comte de Monsoreau; when he was within ten paces of us doubt was no longer possible. •

"I had now almost as much dread of my rescuer as of my persecutor.

"I stood mute and still, in a corner of the window, so that he might not see me. When he reached the foot of the wall, he fastened the boat to a ring and rose until his head was on a level with the casement.

"I could not restrain a slight cry.

"*'Ah, forgive me!'* said the Comte de Monsoreau, *'but I thought you were expecting me.'*

"*'I was expecting some one, monsieur,'* said I, *'but I did not know the person I expected would be you.'*

"A bitter smile passed over the count's face.

"*'Who, pray, except myself and your father, watches over the honor of Diane de Méridor?'*

“ ‘ You told me, monsieur, in the letter you wrote me, that you came in the name of my father.’ ”

“ ‘ Yes, mademoiselle, and as I foresaw you were likely to have doubts about the mission I received, here is a letter from the baron.’ ”

“ And the count presented me a paper.

“ We had not lit the candles, so that we might observe what was likely to occur beyond the walls with more security. I passed from Gertrude’s room into mine, and, kneeling in front of the fire, I read these words by the light of the flame :

“ ‘ My dear Diane, the Comte de Monsoreau alone can rescue you from the danger you run, and this danger is immense. Trust him, then, entirely as the best friend Heaven could send you.

“ ‘ Later on, I will tell you what I desire from the very depths of my heart you should do to discharge the debt we shall contract toward him.

“ ‘ Your father, who entreats you to believe him and have pity on yourself and on him,

“ ‘ Baron de Méridor.’ ”

“ I had no positive basis for my dislike of M. de Monsoreau : the repugnance I felt for him sprang from instinct rather than reason. I might reproach him with the killing of a doe, but that was a very small crime, for a hunter.

“ I went to him, then.

“ ‘ Well ? ’ he asked.

“ ‘ Monsieur, I have read my father’s letter ; he tells me you are ready to get me out of this place ; but he does not say where you are to lead me.’ ”

“ ‘ I will bring you to the place where the baron is, mademoiselle.’ ”

“ ‘ But where is he ? ’ ”

“ ‘ In the Castle of Méridor.’ ”

“ ‘ Then I shall see my father ? ’ ”

“ ‘ In two hours.’ ”

“ ‘ Oh, monsieur, if you are speaking the truth ’—

“ I paused ; the count was evidently waiting for the end of the sentence.

“ ‘ You may rely on my entire gratitude,’ I added, in a weak and trembling voice, for I guessed what it was he expected from that gratitude which I had not strength enough to express.

“ ‘Then, mademoiselle,’ said the count, ‘you are ready to follow me?’ ”

“ I looked anxiously at Gertrude; it was easy seeing the count’s gloomy face inspired her with as little confidence as it did me.

“ ‘Reflect!’ said he; ‘every one of the minutes that are flying has a value for you beyond anything you can imagine. I am half an hour late, nearly. It will soon be ten, and were you not warned that at ten the prince will be in the Castle of Beaugé?’ ”

“ ‘Alas! yes,’ I answered.

“ ‘The prince once here, I can do nothing for you, except risk my life uselessly; I am risking it now, but it is with the certainty of saving you.’ ”

“ ‘Why has not my father come?’ ”

“ ‘Do you think your father is not watched? Do you think he can take a step without it being known where he is going?’ ”

“ ‘But you?’ I asked.

“ ‘With me it is a different thing; I am the prince’s friend and confidant.’ ”

“ ‘But, monsieur,’ I exclaimed, ‘if you are the prince’s friend and confidant, then’ —

“ ‘Then I betray him for your sake: yes, that is the meaning of it. Did I not say just now that I risked my life to save your honor?’ ”

“ There was such a tone of sincerity in the count’s answer, and it harmonized so visibly with the truth, that, though my unwillingness to trust him was not entirely banished, I did not know how to express it.

“ ‘I am waiting,’ said the count.

“ I turned to Gertrude, who was as undecided as I was.

“ ‘See,’ said M. de Monsoreau; ‘if you are still in doubt, look yonder.’ ”

“ And from the direction opposite that by which he had come, he showed me a troop of horsemen advancing to the castle, on the other side of the pond.

“ ‘Who are those men?’ I asked.

“ ‘The Duc d’Anjou and his suite,’ answered the count.

“ ‘Mademoiselle, mademoiselle,’ cried Gertrude, ‘there’s no time to be lost.’ ”

“ ‘There has been too much lost already,’ said the count; ‘in Heaven’s name, decide at once.’ ”

"I fell on a chair; my strength failed me.

"O God! O God! what ought I to do?" I murmured.

"Listen," said the count; "listen, they are knocking at the gate."

"And, in fact, we heard a loud knocking made by two men, who, as we had seen, had separated from the others for this purpose.

"In five minutes," said the count, "there will be no longer time."

"I tried to rise; my limbs gave way under me.

"Help! Gertrude, help!" I stammered.

"Mademoiselle," said the poor girl, "do you not hear the door opening? Do you not hear the tramping of the horses in the courtyard?"

"Yes, yes," I answered, making an effort, "but all my strength is gone."

"Oh, is it only that?" said she, and she took me in her arms, lifted me as if I had been a child, and placed me in the arms of the count.

"As soon as I felt the touch of this man, I shuddered so violently that I was near escaping from him and falling into the lake.

"But he held me close to his breast, and laid me down in the boat."

"Gertrude followed me and entered the boat, unaided.

"Then I noticed that my veil had been unfastened, and was floating on the water.

"The idea occurred to me that it might enable our enemies to trace us.

"My veil, my veil!" said I to the count; "try to recover my veil."

"The count glanced at the object I pointed out.

"No," said he, "better leave it as it is."

"And, seizing the oars, he gave such a violent impetus to the boat that, after a few strokes, we were almost at the edge of the pond.

"At that moment we perceived that the windows of my room were illuminated, and servants were hurrying into it with lights.

"Have I deceived you?" said M. de Monsoreau; "and were we not just in time?"

“Oh, yes, yes, monsieur,” I answered, “you are, in very truth, my savior.”

“Meanwhile the lights seemed to be scurrying about in a very agitated fashion, moving, now into Gertrude’s room, now into mine. Then there were cries; a man entered, before whom all the others fell back. He approached the open window, leaned outside, perceived the veil floating on the water, and uttered a cry.

“You see now I have acted wisely in leaving the veil where it was. The prince will believe that you threw yourself into the lake to escape him, and, while he is searching for you, we will escape.”

“It was then the first time I really trembled in presence of a mind so crafty and subtle — a mind that had wrought out such a plan beforehand.

“At this moment we landed.”

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TREATY.

THERE was again a moment’s silence. Diane, almost as moved by the recollection of these events as she had been by the reality, felt her voice failing. Bussy was listening with all the energies of his soul and was already vowing vengeance on her enemies, whoever they might be.

At length, after inhaling the contents of a little vial which she took from her pocket, Diane was able to continue :

“We had hardly landed when seven or eight men ran up to us. They were the count’s people, and I thought I recognized among them the two servants who escorted our litter when we had been attacked by the persons who led me to the Castle of Beaugé. A groom held two horses : one, the black charger of M. de Monsoreau ; the other, a white nag intended for myself. The count helped me to mount and then jumped on his own horse as soon as I was in the saddle.

“Gertrude was taken up behind one of the count’s men, and when all these arrangements were made we dashed into a gallop.

“I noticed that the count held the bridle of my horse, and I remarked that I was good enough horsewoman to be able to

dispense with his care ; but he answered that she was skittish and might fly off in another direction, thus separating me from him.

“ We had travelled about ten minutes when I heard Gertrude’s voice calling to me. I turned round and saw that our troop had divided. Four men had taken a by-path and were hurrying her into the forest, while the count and four others followed the same road along with me.

“ ‘ Gertrude ! ’ I cried. ‘ Monsieur, why is she not coming with us ? ’

“ ‘ It is an indispensable precaution,’ said he. ‘ If we are pursued, we must leave two tracks behind us ; it is absolutely necessary that those who may have perceived us should be able to say they saw two different women carried off in two different directions. It may then be our good fortune to have the Duc d’Anjou take the wrong road and run after the maid instead of her mistress.’

“ The answer was specious, but not satisfactory. However, what could I say ? what could I do ? I sighed and waited.

“ Moreover, the path taken by the count was the one which led to the Castle of Méridor ; at the gait at which we were going we should be there in a quarter of an hour. But suddenly, at a cross-road well known to me, the count, instead of continuing on the road which would bring me to my father, swerved into a path on the left which clearly led elsewhere. I cried out at once, and, in spite of the rate at which we were galloping, I had my hand on the pommel ready to spring to the ground, when the count, who no doubt had his eye on all my movements, leaned over, seized me by the waist, lifted me up, and set me on his own horse in front of him. Once at liberty, my nag fled, neighing, into the forest.

“ The action was executed so swiftly that I had barely time to utter a cry.

“ The count placed his hand over my mouth.

“ ‘ Mademoiselle,’ said he, ‘ I swear upon my honor that everything I do is by your father’s orders, and I will prove it at our first stopping-place. If you do not regard the proof as sufficient, I pledge you my honor a second time that you shall be free.’

“ ‘ But, monsieur, you told me you were conducting me to my father,’ I cried, thrusting his hand away and throwing my head back.

“ ‘Yes, I told you so because I saw you hesitated to follow me, and a moment's further hesitation would have been fatal to both of us, as you saw for yourself. And now, think of our position,’ said the count, halting. ‘Do you want to kill the baron? Do you want to march to your own dishonor? Say but the word and I lead you back to Méridor.’

“ ‘You said you had a proof you acted for my father?’

“ ‘And here it is,’ answered the count; ‘take this letter and read it at the first place we stop at. If, after reading it, you wish to return to the castle, I again repeat that, upon my honor, you shall be free. But if you have any respect for the baron's orders, you will not return; of that I am very sure.’

“ ‘Then, monsieur, let us gain the first stopping-place as soon as possible, for I am certainly in a hurry to find out if you speak the truth.’

“ ‘Remember, you are coming with me freely.’

“ ‘Yes, freely, or, rather, as freely as a young girl can act who sees on one side her father's death and her own dishonor, and on the other the necessity of trusting in the good faith of a man she hardly knows. No matter, I follow you freely, monsieur, as you shall have evidence of if you are kind enough to give me back my horse.’

“ The count made a sign to one of his men to dismount. I leaped off his steed, and, a moment after, was riding beside him.

“ ‘The nag cannot be far,’ said he to the man who had dismounted; ‘you know she comes like a dog when called by her name or whistled for. You will follow us to La Châtre.’

“ I shuddered in spite of myself. La Châtre was ten leagues from Méridor and on the highroad to Paris.

“ ‘Monsieur,’ said I, ‘I go with you, but at La Châtre we shall make our conditions.’

“ ‘Or, rather, mademoiselle, at La Châtre you shall give your orders,’ answered the count.

“ This assumed deference did not reassure me. However, as I had no choice and as the course suggested by Monsoreau seemed the only one that would enable me to escape from the Duc d'Anjou, I continued my journey in silence. We reached La Châtre at daybreak. But instead of entering the village, we turned aside as soon as we came to the first gardens, crossed the fields, and rode toward a lonely house.

“ I halted.

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“Listen, mademoiselle,” said the count. “I have already remarked that your understanding is clear-sighted and judicious, and it is to your understanding I make my appeal. Can we, in flying from a prince next in power to the King, stop at an ordinary hostelry, in the midst of a village where the first peasant that sees us will denounce us? You might bribe a single man, but you cannot bribe a whole village.”

“Like all the answers of the count, this, too, had a conclusiveness, or a seeming conclusiveness, that struck me.

“Be it so,” said I, “let us go on.”

“And we started again.

“We were expected. A man had been sent in advance, without my knowledge, to provide suitable accommodations.

“A bright fire burned in the chimney of a room that was almost clean, and a bed was ready.

“This is your apartment, mademoiselle,” said the count; “I will await your orders.”

“He saluted, passed out, and left me alone.

“My first act was to approach the lamp and draw my father’s letter from my bosom. Here it is, Monsieur de Bussy. I make you my judge; read.”

Bussy took the letter and read:

“My beloved Diane, if, as I do not doubt, you have, in compliance with my entreaties, followed the Comte de Monsoreau, he must have told you that you have had the misfortune to attract the attention of the Duc d’Anjou, and that it was this prince who had you seized and conducted to the Castle of Beaugé. By this violence you can judge of what he is capable and of the shame that threatens you. There is one way of escaping this shame, which I would not survive: it is to marry our noble friend; once you are Comtesse de Monsoreau, it is his wife the count defends, and he has sworn to me to defend you by any and every means. My wish, then, my darling daughter, is that this marriage take place as soon as possible, and should you yield to my desire, I add a father’s blessing to my formal consent, and pray God to bestow on you all the treasures of happiness which his love reserves for such hearts as yours.

“Your father, who does not command but entreats,

“Baron de Méridor.”

“Alas! madame,” said Bussy, “if this letter be indeed your father’s it is only too positive.”

“It is his — I have no doubt on that point; still, I read it three times before coming to any decision. Then I called the count.

“He entered at once, which proved he had been waiting at the door.

“I was holding the letter in my hand.

“‘Well,’ said he, ‘have you read it?’

“‘Yes,’ I answered.

“‘Do you still doubt of my discretion and respect?’

“‘Though I did, monsieur,’ I answered, ‘this letter would force me to believe in them. And now, monsieur, there is something still. Supposing I am inclined to follow my father’s advice, what do you intend doing?’

“‘I intend leading you to Paris, mademoiselle; it is the place where you can be most easily concealed.’

“‘And my father?’

“‘You know well that, no matter where you are, the baron is sure to join you, as soon as he can do so without exposing you to peril.’

“‘Well, then, monsieur, I am ready to accept your protection on the conditions which you impose.’

“‘I impose nothing, mademoiselle,’ replied the count, ‘I simply offer you the means of saving yourself.’

“‘Then I accept the correction, and say, almost in your own words, I am ready to accept the means of salvation you offer, but on three conditions.’

“‘Speak, mademoiselle.’

“‘The first is that Gertrude be restored to me.’

“‘She is so already,’ said the count.

“‘The second is that we travel apart to Paris.’

“‘I was about to propose it, to avoid offending your delicacy.’

“‘And the third is that our marriage, unless I acknowledge some urgent necessity for it, shall not take place except in the presence of my father.’

“‘It is my most earnest desire. I am sure his blessing on our union will be followed by that of Heaven.’

“I was bewildered. I had believed that, certainly, some one of my proposals, at least, would be found unacceptable, and, lo! they were all such as the count intended to make himself.

“‘Now, mademoiselle,’ said he, ‘will you allow me, in my turn, to give you some advice?’

“‘I will hear you, monsieur.’

“‘Then I should counsel you to travel by night.’

“‘I agree to that fully.’

“‘And to permit me to select the route and the lodgings you will occupy; all my precautions will have but one object — to protect you from the Duc d’Anjou.’

“‘If you love me as you say, monsieur, our interests are the same. I see no objection to complying with your request.’

“‘My last counsel is for you to be satisfied with the home I select for you, however plain and retired.’

“‘All I ask, monsieur, is to be concealed; so the plainer and the more remote the place is the better it will be suited to a fugitive.’

“‘Then we are agreed on all points, mademoiselle, and all that remains, in accordance with the plans you have traced, is for me to present my very humble respects, send you your maid, and give my attention to the route you are to follow.’

“‘And as for myself, monsieur,’ I answered, ‘I am a gentlewoman just as you are a gentleman; do you keep your promises and I will keep mine.’

“‘That is all I ask,’ said the count, ‘and this assurance convinces me that I shall soon be the happiest of men.’

“And with these words he bowed and passed out.

“Five minutes after, Gertrude entered.

“The joy of this good girl was great; she had believed she was separated from me forever. I told her all that had passed; I needed some one who could enter into my views, second my wishes, understand a hint at the proper moment, and obey a sign or a gesture. The complacent behavior of M. de Monsoreau astonished me, and I feared there might be some infraction of the treaty we had just made.

“As I was coming to the end of my story, we heard the sound of a horse’s hoofs. I ran to the window; it was the count galloping back the way we had come. Why did he go back instead of going forward? It was a thing I could not understand. But he had fulfilled the first article of the treaty by restoring Gertrude to me, and he was now observing the second by retiring; I had nothing to complain of. Besides, in whatever direction he went, his absence reassured me.

“We spent all the day in this little house, waited on by our landlady. It was not until evening that the man whom I re-

garded as the leader of our escort entered my room and asked me for orders.

.. As the nearer I was to Beaugé, the greater, in my opinion, was the danger, I told him I was ready. Five minutes later he returned and informed me, as he bowed, that all preparations were made. I found my white nag at the door: she had come at the first call, as the Comte de Monsoreau had predicted.

.. We travelled the whole night, and stopped at daybreak, as on the evening before. I reckoned that we must have made nearly fifteen leagues. However, M. de Monsoreau had seen to it that I should not suffer from cold or weariness; the mare of his choice trotted in a peculiarly gentle fashion, and, when I left the house, a fur mantle was thrown over my shoulders.

.. This halt resembled the first, and all these night journeys were similar to the one we had just made. I was treated on every occasion with the same respect, the same deference, the same attention: it was evident some one preceded us to prepare our lodgings: whether it was the count or not, I could not say, for I never saw him once during our travels: he was plainly determined to obey this article of our treaty as exactly as the other two.

.. On the evening of the seventh day I perceived an immense crowd of houses. It was Paris.

.. We stopped till nightfall: then we resumed our journey.

.. We soon passed under a gate, beyond which the first object that struck me was an immense building, which I knew from its walls to be a monastery: next, we crossed the river at two points, turned to the right, and, after a ten minutes' ride, were in the Place de la Bastille. There, a man, who seemed to be expecting us, came out of a doorway and approached the leader of our escort.

.. 'This is the place,' said he.

.. The leader of the escort turned to me, saying:

.. 'You hear, madame: we have arrived.'

.. Then he leaped from his horse and assisted me in alighting, as had been his custom at every stopping-place.

.. The door was open and the staircase was lighted by a lamp placed on one of the steps.

.. 'Madame,' said the leader of the escort, 'you are now at home. The mission I received to wait upon you ends here; may I hope to be able to say that this mission has been accom-

plished according to your wishes and with all the respect which we were ordered to show toward you ? ”

“ Yes, monsieur,” said I. “ I have nothing but thanks to give you. Offer them also to the other brave men who have accompanied me. I should like to remunerate them in a different fashion : but I possess nothing.”

“ Do not be uneasy, madame, as to that,” he answered, “ they have been rewarded liberally.”

“ After saluting me, he jumped on horseback again, and turning to his men :

“ We depart now,” said he, “ and to-morrow let not one of you remember that you saw this door.”

“ After these words, the little troop rode away and was soon lost in the Rue Saint-Antoine.

“ Gertrude’s first task was to shut the door, and it was through the wicket that we saw them leave.

“ We went upstairs and found ourselves in a corridor upon which three doors opened.

“ We entered the one in the centre : it led into the drawing-room in which we are now sitting and which was then lighted exactly as at present.

“ I went into the room yonder, and found it was a large dressing-room, then that other one, which was to be my bed-chamber, and to my great surprise, I stood in front of my own portrait.

“ It was the one that hung in my father’s room at Méridor : the count had no doubt asked it of the baron and obtained it.

“ I shuddered at this fresh proof that my father already looked upon me as the wife of M. de Monsoreau.

“ We examined all the apartments : they were lonely, but lacked nothing : there were fires in all the chimneys, and in the dining-room a table was already laid out. After a hasty glance, I saw with satisfaction that there was but a single knife and fork on the table.

“ Well, mademoiselle,” said Gertrude, “ you see the count keeps his promise to the end.”

“ Alas ! yes,” I answered, with a sigh. “ I should have better liked if, by failing in some of his promises, he released me from mine.”

“ I sat down to supper : afterward we went through the whole house a second time, but did not meet a living soul then, either ; it was entirely our own, we were by ourselves.

“ Gertrude slept in my room.

“ Next day she set out to examine the neighborhood. It was then only that I learned from her we were living at the end of the Rue Saint-Antoine, opposite the Hôtel des Tournelles, and that the fortress on our right was the Bastile.

“ The information, for that matter, did not tell me much. I knew nothing of Paris, never having been there before.

“ The day slipped by without anything new occurring; in the evening, as I was sitting down to supper, there was a knock at the door.

“ Gertrude and I looked at each other.

“ There was a second knock.

“ ‘ Go and see who it is,’ I said.

“ ‘ If it be the count ? ’ she asked, seeing me turn pale.

“ ‘ If it is the count,’ I answered, making an effort to control myself, ‘ open, Gertrude ; he has kept his promises faithfully ; he shall see that I keep mine.’ ”

“ A moment after Gertrude reappeared.

“ ‘ It is M. le Comte, madame,’ said she.

“ ‘ Show him in,’ I answered.

“ Gertrude withdrew and the count stood on the threshold.

“ ‘ Well, madame,’ he asked. ‘ have I faithfully fulfilled the treaty ? ’

“ ‘ Yes, monsieur,’ I replied, ‘ and I thank you.’

“ ‘ You are graciously pleased to receive me, then,’ he added, with a smile, the irony of which he did not succeed in hiding.

“ ‘ Enter, monsieur.’

“ He came in and remained standing. I made him a sign to be seated.

“ ‘ Have you any news, monsieur ? ’ I asked.

“ ‘ News of where and of whom, madame ? ’

“ ‘ Of Méridor, and of my father especially.’

“ ‘ I did not return to Méridor and have not seen the baron.’

“ ‘ Then of Beaugé and the Duc d’Anjou ? ’

“ ‘ That is different. I have been to Beaugé and I have spoken with the duke.’

“ ‘ In what state of mind is he ? ’

“ ‘ He is trying to doubt.’

“ ‘ What ? ’

“ ‘ Your death.’

“ ‘ But you confirmed it.’

“ ‘ I did all I could.’

“ ‘And where is the duke ?’

“ ‘He returned to Paris yesterday evening.’

“ ‘Why did he return so quickly ?’

“ ‘Because a man can hardly be expected to feel cheerful in a place where he believes he is responsible for a woman’s death.’

“ ‘Did you see him since his return ?’

“ ‘I have just left him.’

“ ‘Did he speak of me ?’

“ ‘I did not give him time.’

“ ‘Of what, then, did you speak ?’

“ ‘Of a promise he once made me which I urged him to execute.’

“ ‘What was it ?’

“ ‘He pledged himself, because of certain services I rendered him, to secure me the post of grand huntsman.’

“ ‘Ah ! yes,’ I said, with a melancholy smile, as I recalled poor Daphne’s death, ‘you are a terrible hunter, I remember, and as such you have a right to the place.’

“ ‘It is not because I am a hunter that I shall obtain it, it is because I am the prince’s servant ; it is not because of any right I have to it that I shall be successful, it is because the Due d’Anjou dare not prove ungrateful to me.’

“ ‘In all those answers, despite their respectful tones, there was something that frightened me ; it was that I saw in them the expression of a sombre and implacable will.

“ ‘For an instant I was dumb.

“ ‘May I write to my father ?’ I asked.

“ ‘Of course ; but your letters may be intercepted.’

“ ‘Am I forbidden to go out ?’

“ ‘You are not forbidden to do anything, madame ; but allow me to observe that you might be followed.’

“ ‘But, at least, I must hear Mass on Sundays ?’

“ ‘It would be better, I fancy, for your safety if you did not hear it ; but, should you be determined on the point, I should recommend you — mind, it is a simple advice I am tendering you — to hear it at the church of Sainte-Catherine.”

“ ‘And where is this church ?’

“ ‘Opposite your house, on the other side of the street.’

“ ‘Thanks, monsieur.’

“ ‘There was silence again.

“ ‘When shall I see you, monsieur ?’

“ ‘When you permit me to return.’

“ ‘Is my permission needed?’

“ ‘Undoubtedly. Until now I have been a stranger to you.’

“ ‘Have you not a key for the house?’

“ ‘Only your husband is entitled to have one.’

“ ‘Monsieur,’ I answered, more dismayed by these strangely submissive replies than I should have been if they had been authoritative in tone, ‘monsieur, be good enough to return whenever you wish, or when you have anything important to communicate.’

“ ‘Thanks, madame, I will use your permission, but not abuse it — and the first proof of this I offer is to tender you my respects and take my leave.’

“ Thereupon the count rose.

“ ‘You are going, then?’ I asked, growing more and more astonished at a way of acting which I had been so far from expecting.

“ ‘Madame,’ answered the count, ‘I know you do not love me, and I will not take advantage of a situation which forces you to receive my attentions. Seeing me only at intervals, you will, I hope, get gradually accustomed to my presence. In this way the sacrifice will cost you less when the moment arrives for you to become my wife.’

“ ‘Monsieur,’ said I, rising in turn, ‘I acknowledge the delicacy with which you have acted, and, in spite of a certain harshness in your language by which it is accompanied, I appreciate it. You are right, and I will speak with a frankness similar to your own; I had certain prejudices in your regard which, I hope, time will cure.’

“ ‘Permit me, madame,’ said the count, ‘to share that hope and to live in expectation of that happy moment.’

“ Then, saluting with all the reverence I could meet with from the humblest of my servants, he made a sign to Gertrude, who was present at the whole conversation, to light him out, and retired.”

CHAPTER XV.

THE MARRIAGE.

"UPON my soul, a strange man that!" said Bussy.

"Oh, yes, very strange indeed, is he not, monsieur? His manner of expressing his love had something of the bitterness with which he might have expressed his hatred. When Gertrude returned she found me sadder and more frightened than ever.

"She tried to cheer me, but it was evident the poor girl was as uneasy as I was myself. This icy respect, this ironical submission, this repressed passion, which vibrated harshly in every one of his words, was more alarming than would have been a plainly expressed resolution, which I might have found means to resist.

"The next day was Sunday; during all my life I had never failed to be present at divine service. I heard the bell of Sainte-Catherine's Church, and it seemed to be calling me. I saw every one making their way to the house of God. Wrapping a thick veil about me and followed by Gertrude, I mingled with the crowd.

"I sought out the darkest corner in the church and knelt against the wall. Gertrude knelt at my side, as if to shield me from the world. This time her guardianship was needless; no one seemed to pay any attention to us.

"Two days afterward, the count returned with the information that he had been appointed grand huntsman; the Duc d'Anjou's influence had procured him a post that had been almost pledged to one of the King's favorites named Saint-Luc. It was a triumph he hardly expected himself."

"And indeed," said Bussy, "we were all astonished."

"He came to announce the news to me in hopes that his new dignity would hasten my consent; but he was neither urgent nor importunate; he expected everything from my promise and from events.

"As for myself, I was beginning to hope that as the Duc d'Anjou believed me dead, there was no longer any danger, and I might find some way of being released from my engagement.

"Seven more days went by, marked by nothing except two visits of the count. Like the preceding visits, they were

cold and respectful. But I have already explained to you the strange, almost menacing character of this coldness and respect.

"The following Sunday I went to church, as I had done before, and occupied the same corner I occupied a week previously. A sense of security often leads to imprudence; in the middle of my prayers I unconsciously put my veil aside. In the house of God I thought only of God — I was praying ardently for my father, when suddenly Gertrude touched my arm. But I was in a state of religious ecstacy, and it was only when she touched me the second time that I raised my head and looked mechanically around me. And then my eyes met those of the Duc d'Anjou, who was staring at me intently.

"A man who appeared to be his confidant rather than his servant stood near him."

"It was Aurilly," said Bussy, "his lute-player."

"Yes," answered Diane; "I think that is the name Gertrude mentioned afterward."

"Continue, madame," said Bussy, "pray continue. I am beginning to understand everything."

"I drew my veil quickly over my face; it was too late — he had seen me, and even if he had not recognized me, my resemblance at least to the woman he had loved and, as he believed, lost, moved him deeply. Troubled by his gaze, which I felt instinctively was riveted on me, I rose and proceeded to the door, but he was there; he dipped his fingers in the font and offered me holy-water as I passed.

"I pretended not to see him and went out without accepting his offer."

"But although I walked straight before me, I knew we were followed. Had I known Paris, I should have tried to deceive the duke as to my real abode, but I had never been in any street except the one leading from the house to the church; I was not acquainted with any one from whom I might ask a quarter of an hour's hospitality; I had not one friend, and my only protector was a greater object of fear to me than would have been an enemy. Such was my position."

"Great heaven!" murmured Bussy, "why did not Providence or chance throw me in your way sooner?"

Diane thanked the young man with a look.

"But excuse me," he continued, "I am always interrupting

you, and yet I am dying of curiosity. Continue, I beseech you."

"M. de Monsoreau came the same evening. I did not know if I should tell him of my adventure. But he made any hesitation on my part unnecessary.

" 'You asked me,' said he, 'if you were forbidden to go to Mass, and I answered that you had supreme control over your own actions, and would act wisely in not stirring from the house. You would not believe me; you went this morning to divine service at the church of Sainte-Catherine; some chance, or rather some fatality, led the prince thither, and he has seen you.'

" 'It is true, monsieur, and I hesitated to mention the matter to you, for I did not know if the prince recognized me to be the person I am, or if my appearance had simply surprised him.'

" 'Your face struck him; your resemblance to the woman he regrets appears to him extraordinary; he followed you and made inquiries, but no one has been able to tell him anything, because no one knows anything.'

" 'Oh, heavens! monsieur,' I cried.

" 'The duke has a dark and persevering soul,' said M. de Monsoreau.

" 'Oh, I hope he will forget me!'

" 'I do not believe it. I have done all I could to get him to forget you, and I have not succeeded.'

"And the first gleam of passion I noticed in M. de Monsoreau flashed from his eyes at that moment. I was more terrified by this flame, blazing out from a fire I thought had burned itself out, than I had been in the morning at the sight of the prince.

"I was silent.

" 'What do you intend doing?' asked the count.

" 'Could I not change from this house and street, live at the other end of Paris, or, better still, return to Anjou?'

" 'It would be useless,' said M. de Monsoreau, shaking his head; 'the Duc d'Anjou is a terrible bloodhound; he is on your track, and, go where you will, he is now sure to come up with you.'

" 'Gracious heaven! How you frighten me!'

" 'I do not wish to do so; I simply tell you how matters are, and nothing else.'

“ ‘Then it is my turn to ask you the question you have just put to me. What do you intend doing, monsieur?’ ”

“ ‘Alas,’ retorted the count, with bitter irony, ‘I am not gifted with a fine imagination. I found a way, but as that way did not please you, I give it up; but do not ask me to form new plans.’ ”

“ ‘But perhaps, after all, the danger is not as pressing as you suppose,’ I urged.

“ ‘That you can only learn from the future, madame,’ said he, rising. ‘In any case I can but add that Madame de Monsoreau would be in less peril from the prince from the fact that as my new office brings me into the closest relations with the King, my wife and I would naturally be protected by the King.’ ”

“ A sigh was my only answer. Everything said by the count was full of reason and probability.

“ M. de Monsoreau waited a moment, as if to give me plenty of time to reply, but I had not strength enough. He was standing, ready to retire. A bitter smile flitted over his lips; he bowed and passed out.

“ I thought I heard him swearing as he was going downstairs.

“ I summoned Gertrude.

“ Gertrude usually stayed in the drawing-room or bed-chamber when the count was present; she ran in.

“ I was at the window, and had wrapped the curtains about me in such a way that, without being perceived, I could see whatever was going on in the street.

“ The count left the house and soon disappeared.

“ We remained there nearly an hour, watching eagerly; but no one came by, and the night passed without anything unusual occurring.

“ The next day Gertrude was accosted by a young man whom she recognized as the person who was with the prince the evening before. But she refused to respond to his flatteries or answer his questions.

“ The young man got tired at last, and went away.

“ This meeting alarmed me exceedingly: it was but the beginning of an inquiry that would certainly not stop there. I was afraid M. de Monsoreau would not come in the evening, and that some attack might be made on me during the night. I sent for him; he came immediately.

"I related everything and described the young man as well as I could from the data furnished by Gertrude.

" 'It was Aurilly,' said he ; ' what answer did Gertrude make him ? '

" ' She made none. '

" M. de Monsoreau reflected a moment.

" ' She was wrong,' said he.

" ' Why ? '

" ' She might have helped us to gain time. '

" ' Time ? '

" ' To-day I am still dependent on the Duc d'Anjou ; but in a fortnight, in twelve days, in a week, perhaps, the Duc d'Anjou will be dependent on me. We must deceive him to gain time. '

" ' Great heavens ! '

" ' Undoubtedly hope will render him patient. A complete refusal would drive him to extremities. '

" ' Monsieur, write to my father,' I cried. ' My father will come here at once and throw himself at the feet of the King. The King will have pity on an old man. '

" ' That will entirely depend on the disposition of the King at the time ; it will depend on whether it is his policy at the moment to be the friend or the enemy of the Duc d'Anjou. Besides, it would take a messenger six days to find your father, and it would take your father six days to come here. In twelve days the Duc d'Anjou could make all the way he wants, if we do not stop him. '

" ' But how can we stop him ? '

" M. de Monsoreau did not answer. I understood his meaning and lowered my eyes.

" ' Monsieur,' said I, ' give your orders to Gertrude and she will obey them. '

" An imperceptible smile passed over M. de Monsoreau's lips at this my first appeal to his protection.

" He talked for some moments with Gertrude.

" ' Madame,' said he, ' I might be seen if I left ; it will be night in two or three hours ; will you permit me to pass these two or three hours in your apartments ? '

" M. de Monsoreau had almost the right to command ; he was satisfied to request. I made him a sign to be seated.

" It was then I noticed the count's perfect self-control ; that very moment, even, he got the better of the embarrassment that

resulted from our respective positions, and his conversation, which the harshness I have already spoken of affected powerfully, became novel and attractive. The count had thought much and had travelled extensively, and before two hours had passed, I understood clearly the influence this singular man had acquired over my father."

Bussy heaved a sigh.

"At nightfall, evidently satisfied with the progress he had made, and without trying to advance farther, he rose and took his leave.

"Then Gertrude and I took our places at the window and watched. This time we distinctly saw two men examining the house. We went to the door several times. As we had put out all the lights, we could not be seen.

"We retired about eleven.

"The next day Gertrude, after leaving the house, found the same young man in the same place; he approached her and asked the same questions he had asked on the previous evening. She was less reserved than usual and exchanged a few words with him.

"On the following day, Gertrude was even still more communicative. She told him I was the widow of a counsellor, that I was without fortune, and lived very retired; he wished for further information, but was assured he must be satisfied with what he had obtained for the present.

"On the day after this, Aurilly seemed to have entertained some doubts as to the truth of the story he had heard. He spoke of Anjou, Beaugé, even mentioned Méridor.

"Gertrude replied that all these names were utterly unknown to her.

"Then he confessed he belonged to the Duc d'Anjou, and that the prince had seen me and fallen in love with me, and, after this confession, magnificent offers were made to her and to me; to her, if she should introduce the prince into the house; to me, if I would receive him.

"M. de Monsoreau came every evening, and I at once told him what had occurred. He remained with us from eight in the evening until midnight; but it was evident that his anxiety was great.

"On Saturday evening he was paler and more agitated than usual.

“‘Listen,’ said he, ‘you must promise to receive the prince on Tuesday or Wednesday.’

“‘And why?’

“‘Because he is at this moment capable of anything; he is now on good terms with the King, and, consequently, we can hope for nothing from the King.’

“‘But between now and Wednesday something may happen to help us.’

“‘Perhaps. I am in daily expectation of a certain event that must place the prince in my power. To bring it about, to hasten its advent, I spare neither toil nor trouble. I have to leave you to-morrow. I am obliged to go to Monsoreau.’

“‘Is it necessary?’ I asked, at once frightened and pleased.

“‘Yes. I have an appointment there upon which it absolutely depends whether the event of which I have spoken shall come to pass or not.’

“‘But if the situation remain the same, what are we to do then?’

“‘What can I do against a prince’s power, madame, when I have no right to protect you? We must submit to ill-fortune.’

“‘Oh, father! father!’ I cried.

“‘The count fixed his eyes on me.

“‘Oh, monsieur! what shall I do?’

“‘Have you anything to reproach me with?’

“‘Nothing; quite the contrary.’

“‘Have I not been as devoted as a friend, as respectful as a brother?’

“‘You have behaved as a gentleman, in every respect.’

“‘Did I not have your promise?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘Have I once reminded you of it?’

“‘No.’

“‘And yet, when the circumstances are such that you find yourself placed between an honorable position and a shameful one, you prefer to be the Duc d’Anjou’s mistress rather than be the Comte de Monsoreau’s wife.’

“‘I have not said so, monsieur.’

“‘Then decide.’

“‘I have decided.’

“‘To be the Comtesse de Monsoreau?’

“Rather than the mistress of the Duc d’Anjou.”

“Rather than the mistress of the Duc d’Anjou. The alternative is flattering.”

“I was silent.

“No matter. Let Gertrude gain time until Tuesday — you understand? and on Tuesday we’ll see what happens.”

Gertrude went out as usual the next day, but did not meet Aurilly. When she returned, we began to feel uneasier at his absence than we should have been at his presence. Gertrude left the house a second time, not that there was any necessity for it, but solely in the hope of seeing him; however, he did not appear. A third trip turned out as useless as the two others.

“I then sent Gertrude to M. de Monsoreau’s lodgings; he was gone, and no one knew where he was.

“We were alone and isolated; we were conscious of our weakness, and, for the first time, I felt I had been unjust to the count.”

“Oh, madame,” cried Bussy, “do not be in any hurry to trust this man; there is something throughout his entire conduct which we do not know, but which we will know.”

“Night came on, and with it increasing terror; I was prepared for anything rather than fall alive into the Duc d’Anjou’s power. I had managed to get a poniard, and was determined to stab myself before the prince’s eyes the very moment he or his people attempted to lay hands on me. We barricaded ourselves in our rooms, for, through some incredible neglect, the street door had no bolt on the inside. We concealed the lamp and took our post at our usual observatory.

“All was quiet until eleven; at that hour five men issued forth from the Rue Saint-Antoine, appeared to deliberate for a time, and then hid in an angle of the Hôtel des Tournelles.

“We began to tremble; these men were probably there on our account.

“However, they kept perfectly still. Thus passed nearly a quarter of an hour.

“Then we saw two other men at the corner of the Rue Saint-Paul. Gertrude was enabled by the light of the moon, which, for a moment, emerged from the clouds, to recognize one of these two men as Aurilly.

“Alas! mademoiselle, there are two of them,” murmured the poor girl.

“‘Yes,’ I answered, shivering with terror, ‘and there are five others yonder ready to aid them.’

“‘But they will have to break open the door,’ said Gertrude, ‘and at the noise the neighbors will run hither.’

“‘What reason have you for thinking the neighbors will help us? What do they know about us? Is it likely, then, they will expose themselves to danger for the sake of defending us? Alas, Gertrude! our only real defender is the count.’

“‘Then why do you persist in refusing to be his countess?’

“‘I heaved a sigh.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MARRIAGE — (*Continued*).

“DURING this time the two men at the corner of the Rue Saint-Paul had glided along the houses and were now under our windows.

“‘We opened the casement softly.

“‘Are you sure this is it?’ asked a voice.

“‘Yes, monseigneur, perfectly sure. It is the fifth house from the corner of the Rue Saint-Paul.’

“‘And do you think the key will fit?’

“‘I took an impression of the lock.’

“‘I seized Gertrude’s arm violently.

“‘And once inside?’

“‘Once inside, the thing is settled: the maid will let us in. Your Highness has a golden key in your pocket which is quite as good as this.’

“‘Then open.’

“The next thing we heard was the key turning in the lock. But, all of a sudden, the men in ambush at the corner of the hotel came out from the wall and rushed on the prince and Aurilly, crying: ‘Death! Death!’

“It was all a mystery to me: but one thing I understood in a dim sort of way: it was that we were being succored in some unexpected, incredible manner. I fell on my knees and poured out my thanks to Heaven.

“However, as soon as the prince showed himself, as soon as he told who he was, every voice was hushed, every sword was sheathed, every aggressor took a step backward.”

"Yes," said Bussy, "it was not at the prince they aimed, it was at me."

"In any case," answered Diane, "this attack led to the departure of the prince. We saw him going away by the Rue de Jouy, while the five gentlemen returned to their hiding-place at the corner of the Hôtel des Tournelles.

"It was evident that, for this night at least, we were free from danger, for, clearly, these five gentlemen had no quarrel with me. But we were so restless and excited that we gave up all thought of going to bed; we remained at the window, on the watch for some unusual incident which we instinctively felt was at hand.

"We had not long to wait. A man appeared on horseback in the Rue Saint-Antoine, keeping the middle of the street. It was undoubtedly the person the five gentlemen were waylaying, for, as soon as they saw him, they shouted: '*To arms! To arms!*' and fell upon him.

"You know all about this gentleman," said Diane, "because this gentleman was yourself."

"On the contrary, madame," answered Bussy, who was hoping that the young woman would reveal some of the secrets of her heart during her narrative, "on the contrary, I know nothing except the fight, since, after it was over, I fainted."

"It is needless to tell you of the interest we took in this unequal struggle, so valiantly sustained," continued Diane, with a slight blush. "Every incident in the combat drew from us a shudder, a cry, a prayer. We witnessed your horse sink to the ground. We thought you were lost; but our fears were useless; the brave Bussy proved that he deserved his reputation. You fell on your feet and did not need to rise in order to strike your enemies. At length, surrounded and threatened on every side, you retreated like a lion, facing your foes, and rested against the door. Then the same thought occurred to Gertrude and me: it was to go down and let you in. She looked at me. '*Yes,*' was my answer, and we both hurried to the staircase. But, as I have told you, we had barricaded ourselves in our room, and it took us some seconds to remove the furniture obstructing our passage, and, just as we came to the landing, we heard the street door closing.

"We remained quite still. Who was the person that had entered, and how had he got in?"

"I leaned for support on Gertrude ; we spoke not a word, but waited.

"Soon we heard steps in the alley ; then they drew near the stairs, and a man appeared, who tottered, threw up his arms, and fell, with a hollow groan, on the first step of the staircase.

"It was evident this man was not followed, that he had placed the door, which had so fortunately been left open by the Due d'Anjou, between himself and his enemies, and that, though dangerously, perhaps mortally wounded, he had fallen down at the foot of the stairs.

"In any case we had nothing to fear, while, on the other hand, this man had urgent need of our help.

"*'The lamp !'* I said to Gertrude. She ran out and returned with the light.

"We were not mistaken ; you had swooned. We recognized you as the brave gentleman who had so valiantly defended himself ; and we decided, without any hesitation, to aid you.

"In a moment you were borne into my room and laid on the bed.

"You remained unconscious ; evidently a surgeon was needed. Gertrude remembered having heard of a marvellous cure effected some days before by a young doctor in the Rue — Rue Beautrellis. She knew his address, and offered to go for him.

"*'But,'* said I, *'this young man may betray us.'*

"*'Do not be alarmed,'* she answered, *'I'll see to that.'*

"She is at once a courageous and prudent girl," continued Diane ; "so I trusted her entirely. She took some money, a key, and my poniard, and I was alone by your side, — praying for you."

"Alas, madame," said Bussy. "I was unconscious of my happiness."

"A quarter of an hour later, Gertrude returned with the young doctor ; he had consented to everything, and followed her with his eyes bandaged.

"I stayed in the drawing-room while he was being conducted into the chamber. There he was allowed to remove the bandage from his eyes."

"Yes," said Bussy, "it was just then I came to myself ; my eyes opened on your portrait, and I think I saw you entering."

"You are right: I entered: my anxiety got the better of my prudence: I exchanged a few questions with the young doctor: he examined your wound, answered for your recovery, and I felt relieved."

"All that remained in my mind," said Bussy, "but it was like the recollection of a dream: and yet something told me here," added the young man, laying his hand on his heart, "that I had not dreamed."

"When the surgeon had dressed your wound, he drew a little flask from his pocket: it contained a red liquid, and he let a few drops fall on your lips. It was, he told me, an elixir which would send you to sleep and counteract the fever."

"And in fact, the instant after you swallowed the drops, you closed your eyes again and fell back into the same sort of swoon you were in a moment before."

"I was frightened, but the doctor reassured me."

"Everything, he said, was going on in the best possible manner, and all that could be done now was to let you sleep."

"Gertrude again covered his eyes with a handkerchief, and led him back to the Rue Beautrellis."

"She fancied, however, she noticed him counting the steps."

"It was true, madame," said Bussy, "he did count them."

"This intelligence alarmed me. The young man might betray us. We decided to get rid of every trace of the hospitality we had afforded you; but the important point was first to get rid of you."

"I summoned up all my courage. It was two in the morning; the streets were deserted. Gertrude declared she could lift you up, and she proved the truth of the assertion, and, between us, we succeeded in carrying you to the embankment of the Temple. Then we returned, frightened at our daring in venturing into the streets at an hour when even men do not go abroad except in company."

"However, God watched over us. We met no one and no one noticed us."

"But after I entered the house, my emotion overpowered me and I fainted."

"Ah, madame! madame!" cried Bussy, clasping his hands, "how can I ever repay you for what you have done for me?"

There was a moment's silence, during which Bussy gazed ardently on Diane. The young woman leaned her elbow on the table and let her head rest on her hand.

In the midst of the silence, the clock of Sainte-Catherine's church struck the hour.

"Two!" exclaimed Diane, starting up. "Two, and you here!"

"Oh, madame!" entreated Bussy. "do not send me away until you have told me all. Do not send me away until you have shown me how I can be useful to you. Suppose that God has given you a brother, and now tell this brother what he can do for his sister."

"Alas, nothing," said the young woman; "it is too late."

"What happened next day?" asked Bussy; "what did you do on the day I was thinking only of you, although I was not sure you were not a delirious dream, a feverish vision?"

"During that day," resumed Diane, "Gertrude went out and met Aurilly, who was more urgent than ever; he did not say a word of what took place the evening before; but he requested an interview in his master's name.

"Gertrude pretended to yield, but said the matter must be deferred until the following Wednesday — that is to say, to-day — to give her time to influence me in the prince's favor.

"Aurilly promised his master would curb his passion until then.

"We had, therefore, a respite of three days.

"M. de Monsoreau returned in the evening.

"We related everything to him, except what concerned you. We told him how, on the night before, the duke had opened the door with a false key, but that, at that very moment, he had been attacked by five gentlemen, among whom were MM. d'Épernon and de Quélus. I had heard these two names mentioned and I repeated them.

"Yes, yes," he answered, "I heard of that. So he has a false key. I suspected it."

"Could not the lock be changed?" I asked.

"He would have another one made," said the count.

"Suppose we got bolts for the door?"

"He will come with half a score of men and break through bolts and bars."

"What about the affair that was to place the prince in your power, as you mentioned?"

"Delayed, perhaps delayed indefinitely."

"I was struck dumb and drops of perspiration stood on my forehead; I could no longer hide from myself that the

only means of escaping the Duc d'Anjou was to wed the count.

“ ‘Monsieur,’ said I, ‘the duke has promised, through his confidant, to wait till Wednesday night : I ask you to wait till Tuesday.’

“ ‘Then on Tuesday night, at the same hour, I will be here, madame,’ said the count.

“ And, without another word, he rose and withdrew.

“ I followed him with my eyes : but instead of going away, he took his station at the same dark corner of the wall of Les Tournelles and seemed resolved to watch over me all night.

“ Every fresh proof of his devotion was a stab in my heart.

“ The two days slipped by rapidly, and nothing disturbed my solitude. But what I suffered during these two days, as hour sped swiftly after hour, it would be impossible for me to describe.

“ When the night of the second day arrived, I was utterly spiritless ; all feeling seemed to have died away in me. I was like a statue — cold, dumb, and, apparently, insensible ; my heart alone beat ; the rest of my body gave no signs of life.

“ Gertrude kept at the window. As to myself, I sat where I sit now, doing nothing except occasionally wiping away the perspiration that bedewed my forehead.

“ Suddenly Gertrude pointed in the direction opposite me ; but this gesture, which lately would have made me spring to my feet, left me unmoved.

“ ‘Madame !’ said she.

“ ‘Well ?’ I asked.

“ ‘Four men — I see four men — they are coming this way — they are opening the door — they are entering.’

“ ‘These four men must be the Duc d’Anjou, Aurilly, and their attendants.’

“ I drew my poniard and laid it beside me on the table.

“ ‘Oh, let me see, at least,’ cried Gertrude, running to the door.

“ ‘Yes, go and see,’ I answered.

“ Gertrude was back in a moment.

“ ‘Mademoiselle,’ said she, ‘it is the count.’

“ I replaced the poniard in my dress without a word. Then I turned my face to the count.

“ He was evidently terrified at my paleness.

“ ‘What is this Gertrude tells me.?’ he cried ; ‘that you

took me for the duke, and, if I had been the duke you would have killed yourself?'

"It was the first time I saw him moved. Was his emotion real or artificial?"

"It was wrong of Gertrude to tell you that, monsieur,' I answered; 'now that it is not the duke, all is well.'

"There was a moment's silence.

"You know that I have not come alone,' said the count.

"Gertrude saw four men.'

"Do you suspect who they are?"

"I presume one is a priest and two of the others witnesses.'

"Then you are ready to become my wife?"

"Was it not so agreed? But I remember the treaty; it was also stipulated that unless I acknowledged the case to be urgent, I was not to marry you except in my father's presence.'

"I remember the condition perfectly, mademoiselle; do you believe the case is urgent at present?"

"Yes, I believe so.'

"Well?"

"Well, I am ready to marry you, monsieur. But — you recollect, do you not? — I will be your wife only in name until I have seen my father.'

"The count frowned and bit his lips.

"Mademoiselle,' said he, 'it is not my intention to coerce you; though you have pledged me your word, I return it — you are free; but' —

"He approached the window and glanced into the street.

"But,' said he, 'look!'

"I rose, impelled by that powerful attraction which forces the unfortunate to make sure of their misfortunes, and, beneath the window, I perceived a man, wrapped in a cloak, who was seemingly attempting to get into the house."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Bussy; "and you say that it was yesterday?"

"Yes, count, yesterday, about nine in the evening."

"Continue," said Bussy.

"A moment later another man, with a lantern in his hand, joined the first.

"What do you think of those two men?" asked M. de Monsoreau.

" 'I suppose it is the duke and his follower,' I answered.

Bussy groaned.

" 'Now,' continued the count, 'give your orders: shall I remain or shall I withdraw?'

" 'I hesitated for a moment; yes, in spite of my father's letter, in spite of my pledged word, in spite of the present peril that was so palpable and so menacing, I hesitated; and had not those two men been yonder' —

" 'Oh, wretch that I am!' cried Bussy; 'the man in the cloak was myself, and the man with the lantern was Rémy le Handouin, the young doctor you sent for.'

" 'It was you!' exclaimed Diane, stupefied.

" 'Yes, it was I. Becoming more and more convinced of the reality of my recollections, I was trying to discover the house into which I had been taken, the room to which I was carried, and the woman, or rather angel, who had appeared to me. Ah! had I not good reason to call myself a wretch?'

And Bussy was utterly crushed under the weight of that fatality which had induced Diane to give her hand to the count.

" 'And so,' said he, after a moment, 'you are his wife?'

" 'Since yesterday,' answered Diane.

There was renewed silence, broken only by their hurried breathing.

" 'But,' asked Diane suddenly, 'how did you come to enter this house? How is it you are here?'

Bussy, without a word, showed her the key.

" 'A key!' cried Diane; 'from whom did you get this key?'

" 'Did not Gertrude promise the prince to introduce him to the house this evening? He had seen both myself and M. de Monsoreau, just as we had seen him; he feared a trap and has sent me in his place.'

" 'And you accepted this mission?' said Diane, reproachfully.

" 'It was the only way of reaching you. Surely you are not so unjust as to be angry with me for coming in search of one of the greatest joys and sorrows of my life?'

" 'Yes, I am angry,' said Diane. 'It would have been better if you had not seen me; and now it would be better to see me no more and forget me.'

" 'No, madame,' answered Bussy, 'you are mistaken. On the contrary, it was God who led me hither in order to fathom

to its very depths this plot of which you are the victim. Listen: on the very instant I saw you I devoted to you my life. The mission I have courted is about to begin. You have asked for news of your father?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Diane, "for, in very truth, I do not know what has become of him."

"Well, then," said Bussy, "I undertake to bring you news of him. Only cherish a kindly remembrance of one who, from this hour, will live by you and for you."

"But that key?" said Diane anxiously.

"The key?" returned Bussy; "I restore it to you, for I will receive it only from your hand; but I pledge you my honor as a gentleman that never did sister confide the key of her apartment to a brother more devoted or respectful."

"I trust to the word of the brave Bussy," said Diane. "Here, monsieur."

And she gave back the key to the young man.

"Madame," said he, "in a fortnight we shall know who and what M. de Monsoreau is."

And saluting Diane with an air in which respect was blended with ardent love and deep sadness, Bussy withdrew.

Diane leaned toward the door to listen to the sound of the young man's retreating footsteps, and long after that sound had died away, she was listening still, with beating heart and eyes bathed in tears.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW LONG IT TOOK HENRI III. TO TRAVEL FROM PARIS TO FONTAINEBLEAU.

THE sun that arose four or five hours after the events we have just related saw by its pale light, which barely succeeded in silvering the edges of a reddish cloud, the departure of Henri III. for Fontainebleau, where, as we have also mentioned, there was to be a great hunting party in two days.

This departure, which in the case of another prince might have passed unnoticed, created a sensation by the bustle, noise, and confusion it led in its train; in this resembling all the incidents in the life of this strange monarch whose reign we have undertaken to portray.

Before eight o'clock in the morning a crowd of gentlemen on duty, mounted on good horses and wrapped in fur cloaks, rode out through the gateway situated between the Cour de Coin and the Rue de l'Astruce, and formed a line on the Quai du Louvre; after them came a legion of pages, next a multitude of lackeys, and last, a company of Swiss, which went immediately in front of the royal litter.

This litter, drawn by eight magnificently caparisoned mules, merits the honor of a detailed description.

It was a machine, almost in the form of a square, resting on four wheels; it was furnished with a superabundance of cushions inside and hung with curtains of brocade on the outside; it was about fifteen feet long and eight feet broad. When the roads were uneven or hilly an indefinite number of oxen was substituted for the eight mules; their slow but vigorous pertinacity, although not conducive to speed, gave assurance, however, that they would reach their goal some time or other — if not in an hour, at least in two or three.

This machine contained Henri III. and all his court, the Queen, Louise de Vandemont, excepted, who, we may as well say, was of so little account in her husband's court, unless during a period of processions and pilgrimages, that it is scarce worth while mentioning her.

Let us, therefore, leave out the poor Queen, and direct our attention to the composition of King Henri's court when that monarch travelled.

It consisted, first, of King Henri himself: his physician; Marc Miron, his chaplain, whose name has not come down to us; our old acquaintance, Chicot, the jester; five or six of the minions in favor, who, for the nonce, were Quélus, Schomberg, D'Épernon, D'O, and Maugiron; a couple of huge greyhounds, that yawned incessantly and slipped in their long, snake-like heads between all these people who sat, or stood, or knelt, or reclined on cushions; and a basket of little English dogs, which alternately rested on the King's knees or hung from his neck, suspended by a chain or by ribbon.

Occasionally a hind was brought from a sort of kennel made for her accommodation, and suckled this basketful of puppies from her milk-swollen udders; the two hounds looking on sympathetically the while as they rubbed their sharp muzzles against the string of beads, fashioned like death's-

heads, that rattled at the King's side; they knew the favor they enjoyed and were not jealous.

From the ceiling of the litter swung a cage of gilt copper wire; it contained the most beautiful doves in the world, with plumage white as snow and black rings round their necks.

If, perchance, a lady entered the royal litter the menagerie was augmented by the presence of two or three monkeys of the sapajo species, the monkey enjoying, for the moment, great favor among the exquisites at the court of the last of the Valois.

An image of Our Lady of Chartres, wrought in marble by Jean Goujon for Henri II., stood in a gilt niche at the back of the litter; she gazed down on her divine son with eyes that seemed astonished at all they saw.

It was natural, then, that all the pamphlets of the time, and there was no scarcity of them, and all the satires of the period, and there were enough and to spare of them, should have done this litter the honor of directing attention to it frequently: their usual designation for it was "Noah's Ark."

The King sat at the back of the litter, just under the niche and statue; at his feet lay Quélus and Maugiron, plaiting ribbons. This was one of the most serious occupations of the young people of that era; some of them had succeeded in weaving twelve different pieces into a braid, an unknown art till then, and unfortunately lost since that period; Schomberg, in a corner, was embroidering his coat of arms on a piece of tapestry, as well as a motto, which he believed new, but which was really not new at all; in another corner the chaplain and the doctor were chatting; D'O and D'Épernon were looking through the hangings, and, as they had been awakened too early, were yawning as wearily as the greyhounds; and, finally, Chicot, seated on the edge of one of the curtains, with his legs hanging outside the litter in order to be able to jump out and in again as the whim might seize him, was singing psalms, reciting lampoons, or making anagrams; he managed to twist the names of the courtiers into forms that were infinitely disagreeable to the personages whose individuality was thus mangled by the liberties he took with their cognomens.

On reaching the Place du Châtelet, Chicot began intoning a canticle.

The chaplain, who, as we have said, was talking with Miron, turned round, frowning.

"Chicot, my friend," said the King, "beware! you may make mincemeat of my minions, tear my majesty to tatters, say what you like of God, — God is good, — but do not get into a quarrel with the Church."

"Thanks for your advice, my son," returned Chicot, "I did not see our worthy chaplain, who was discoursing yonder with the doctor on the subject of the last corpse sent him to bury; he was complaining it was the third that day, and always came at meal-time, thereby disturbing his digestion. Your words are golden, my son; no more psalms; they are too old. But I'll sing you a song that is quite new."

"To what air?" asked the King.

"To the same air always;" and he began at the top of his voice:

" 'Our King a hundred millions owes' —

"I owe more than that," said Henri; "your ballad-monger has not been correctly informed."

Chicot began again, without noticing the interruption:

" 'Our King *two* hundred millions owes,
Of which his minions had the spending —
To foot the bills, they now propose
To tax his subjects unoffending,
Propose new imposts, wrongful laws,
To wring the last sou from the peasant —
And all to glut their harpy maws,
And make their mean lives gay and pleasant.' "

"Upon my word," said Quélus, going on with his plaiting, "you have a fine voice, Chicot; the second stanza, my friend."

"I say, Valois," said Chicot, not deigning to answer Quélus, "order thy friends not to call me their friend; it humiliates me."

"Speak in verse, Chicot; your prose is not worth a straw," replied the King.

"Agreed," returned Chicot, and he went on:

" 'A minion's as vile as vile can be,
He's garbed in such lascivious fashion
The wife who dared to dress so free
Her husband soon would lay the lash on!
His ample ruff looks very nice;
His neck turns easily inside it,
Because that ruff is starched with rice —
As for common wheat starch — he can't abide it! ' "

“Bravo!” said the King; “was it not you, D’O, that invented rice-starch?”

“No, sire,” said Chicot, “it was M. de Saint-Mégrin, who was killed last year by M. de Mayenne. What the devil! would you rob a poor dead man of the honor due him? Saint-Mégrin used to reckon that his only chance of going down to posterity rested on this starch and on what he did to M. de Guise. Now, if you take away the starch from him, you stop him when he is only half way on his journey.”

And, without paying attention to the expression on the King’s face, which grew dark at the recollection evoked by his jester, Chicot continued:

“‘The way he wears his hair is queer’ —

“Of course,” said Chicot, interrupting himself, “the allusion is for the minions only, that is understood.”

“Yes, yes; go on,” said Schomberg.

Chicot resumed:

“‘The way he wears his hair is queer,
Although it’s clipped symmetrically:
‘Tis long in front from ear to ear,
And cropped behind, which does n’t tally.’”

“Your song is stale already,” said D’Épernon.

“Stale! Why, it was made yesterday.”

“Well, the fashion changed this morning. Look!”

And D’Épernon took off his cap and showed Chicot his hair, which was almost as closely shaved in front as behind.

“Did ever any one see such an ugly head?” exclaimed Chicot.

And he continued:

“‘With sticky gums his locks are fed,
And twisted and peaked that he may look daring;
A cap is perched on his empty head —
And now you’ve got his portrait and bearing.’

“I pass over the fourth stanza,” said Chicot; “it is so immodest it might shock you.”

And he went on:

“‘I wonder if our sires of old,
Whose deeds illumine history’s pages,
Whose feats of emprise, high and bold,
Will ring forever through the ages,

Would have declined the parlous fight
Till they had touched with paint their faces,
Have kept away, unless bedight
With curls and wigs and frills and laces!"

"Bravo!" said Henri; "if my brother were here he would be very grateful to you, Chicot."

"Whom callest thou brother, my son?" asked Chicot. "Would it be, peradventure, Joseph Foulon, Abbot of St. Genevieve, where thou goest to say thy prayers?"

"No, no," returned Henri, who always took kindly to the drolleries of his jester. "I mean my brother François."

"Ah! thou'rt right, my son; the other one is not thy brother in God, but thy brother in the devil. Good! good! thou speakest of François, child of France by the grace of God, Duke of Brabant, Lauthier, Luxembourg, Gueldre, Alençon, Anjou, Touraine, Berry, Évreux, and Château-Thierry, Count of Flandres, Holland, Zeland, Zutphen, Maine, Perche, Mantes, Frise, and Malines, Defender of the liberty of Belgium, to whom nature gave one nose and to whom the small-pox hath given two, and on whom I — even I — have made this quatrain:

"Nothing strange the fact discloses
That our François has two noses.
Two noses on a double-face
Are surely in their proper place."

The minions fell into fits of laughter, for the Duc d'Anjou was their personal enemy, and the epigram against the prince made them forget for the moment the lampoon he had sung against themselves.

As for the King, he had been hardly touched, so far, by this running fire, and laughed louder than anybody, sparing no one, giving sugar and pastry to his dogs and the rough edge of his tongue to his brother and his brother's friends.

Suddenly Chicot shouted:

"Ah, that is not judicious! Henri, Henri, it is rash and imprudent."

"What do you mean?" said the King.

"Take Chicot's word for it, you ought not to confess to such things as that. Shame! Shame!"

"What things?" asked Henri, astonished.

"The things you say of yourself when you sign your name. Ah, Harry! ah, my son!"

"Be on your guard, sire," said Quélus, who suspected the affected gentleness of Chicot covered some malicious roguery.

"What the devil do you mean?" inquired the King.

"When you write your signature, how do you sign? Be honest."

"*Pardieu!* I sign — I sign myself — Henri de Valois."

"Good! Be kind enough to notice, gentlemen, that I did not force him to say so. Let us see, now; would there be any way of finding a V among these thirteen letters?"

"Undoubtedly. Valois begins with a V."

"Take out your tablets, Messire Chaplain; I want you to take down the real name of the King — the name that must be signed by him henceforth; Henri de Valois is only an anagram."

"How?"

"Yes, only an anagram; I am going to tell you the true name of his Majesty now happily reigning. We say: In Henri de Valois there is a *V*; put a *V* on your tablets."

"Done," said D'Épernon.

"Is there not also an *i*?"

"Certainly; it is the last letter of the name 'Henri.'"

"How great must be the malice of men," said Chicot, "when it tempts them to separate letters which are naturally so closely connected! Place me the *i* beside the *V*. Are you through?"

"Yes," said D'Épernon.

"And now let us look and see if we cannot discover an *l*: you've got it, have you? and *n*, we've got that, too; now for another *i*, he's ours: and an *n* for the finish. Capital! Do you know how to read. Nogaret?"

"To my shame, I confess that I do," said D'Épernon.

"Fiddlesticks! thou knave; thou dost not rank high enough as a noble to be able to boast of thy ignorance."

"You rascal!" returned D'Épernon, raising his cane over Chicot.

"Strike, but spell," said Chicot.

D'Épernon laughed and spelled.

"V-i-l-a-i-n, *vilain*," said he.

"Good!" cried Chicot. "And now you see, Henri, how the thing begins; there is your real baptismal name already discovered. I expect you to give me a pension like the one bestowed on M. Amyot by our royal brother Charles IX., as soon as I discover your family name."

"I expect I shall have you endgelled, Chicot," said the King.

"And pray where are the canes gathered with which gentlemen are endgelled, my son? Is it in Poland? Tell me that."

"It seems to me, however," said Quélus, "that M. de Mayenne had no trouble in finding one, my poor Chicot, the day he detected you with his mistress."

"That is an account that has yet to be settled. Don't be uneasy about it, Monsieur Cupido, the score is chalked down — there; it will be wiped off some day."

And Chicot laid his hand on his forehead, which proves that, even in those times, the head was recognized as the seat of the memory.

"I say, Quélus," exclaimed D'Épernon, "we're going to lose sight of the family name, and all through your gabbling."

"Don't be alarmed," said Chicot, "I hold it; if I were speaking to M. de Guise, I would say: I hold it by the horns; but to you, Henri, I will content myself with saying: by the ears."

"The name! The name!" cried all the young men together.

"We have, among the remaining letters, a capital *H*: set down the *H*, Nogaret."

D'Épernon obeyed.

"Then an *e*, then an *r*, then, over yonder, in Valois, an *o*: then, as you separate the prænomen from the nomen by what the grammarians call the particle, I lay my hand on a *d* and on an *e*, which, with the *s* at the end of the race-name, will make for us — will make for us — Spell, D'Épernon; what does *H, e, r, o, d, e, s* spell?"

"Herodes," said D'Épernon.

"*Vilain Herodes!*" cried the King.

"Quite correct," said Chicot; "and that is the name you sign every day of your life, my son. Oh, fie!"

And Chicot fell back, expressing by his attitude all the symptoms of a chaste and bashful horror.

"Monsieur Chicot," said the King, "there is a limit to my endurance."

"Why," returned Chicot, "I state but a fact. I say what *is*, and nothing else; but that is the way with kings: give them a caution, and they at once get angry."

"A fine genealogy you have made for me!" said Henri.

"Do not disown it, my son," said Chicot. *Ventre de*

biche ! It is a rather good one for a king who needs the help of the Jews two or three times a month."

"That rascal is determined to have the last word," cried the King. "Hold your tongues, gentlemen ; when he finds no one answers him, he will stop."

That very moment there was profound silence — a silence Chicot, who appeared to be paying particular attention to the street they were travelling in, did not show the slightest inclination to break. This state of things lasted several minutes, when, just as they came to the corner of the Rue des Noyers, beyond the Place Maubert, Chicot jumped from the litter, pushed through the guards, and fell on his knees in front of a rather good-looking house with a carved wooden balcony resting on a painted entablature.

"Hah, pagan !" cried the King, "if you want to kneel, kneel, at least, before the cross in the middle of the Rue Sainte-Geneviève, and not before that house. Is it that there is an oratory or an altar inside it ?"

But Chicot did not answer ; he had flung himself on his knees and was saying, at the pitch of his voice, the following prayer, of which the King did not lose a single word :

"God of goodness ! God of justice ! here is the house. I recognize it well, and shall always recognize it. Here is the house where Chicot suffered, if not for thee, O God, at least for one of thy creatures. Chicot has never asked thee for vengeance on M. de Mayenne, the author of his martyrdom, nor on Maître Nicolas David, its instrument. No, Lord, Chicot has known how to wait, for Chicot is patient, although he is not eternal, and for six years, one of them a leap year, Chicot has been piling up the interest of the little account opened between him and MM. de Mayenne and Nicolas David ; now at ten per cent., which is the legal rate, since it is the rate at which the King borrows — the interest, accumulated in seven years, doubles the capital. Grant, then, O great and just God, that Chicot's patience may last another year, and that the lashes Chicot received in this house by order of that princely Lorraine butcher and that cut-throat Norman pettifogger, lashes which cost the said Chicot a pint of blood, may bring a return of a hundred lashes and two pints of blood for each of them ; so M. de Mayenne, fat as he is, and Nicolas David, long as he is, will no longer have blood or hide enough to pay Chicot, and will be forced into bankruptcy to the tune of a

deficit of fifteen or twenty per cent., seeing that the eightieth or the eighty-fifth stroke will be the death of them.

"In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen!"

"Amen!" said the King.

Chicot kissed the ground, and, in the midst of the utter bewilderment of all the spectators, who were entirely in the dark as to the meaning of the scene, he then resumed his place in the litter.

"Now, then," said the King, who, though he had flung most of his prerogatives to others during the last three years, felt that he was, at least, entitled to the earliest information about an incident of importance, "now, then, Master Chicot, why did you repeat that long and singular litany? Why did you beat your breast so furiously? What did you mean by those mummeries before a house that, to all appearance, has no religious character?"

"Sire," answered the jester, "Chicot is like the fox: Chicot scents and licks the stones where he left his blood behind him, waiting for the day when he shall crush the heads of those who spilled it on those same stones."

"Sire!" cried Quélus, "I am ready to bet that Chicot has mentioned the name of the Duc de Mayenne in his prayer, and I think your Majesty heard him do so; I will, therefore, also bet that this prayer had some connection with the flogging we spoke of a while go."

"Bet, O Seigneur Jacques de Lévis, Comte de Quélus!" said Chicot; "bet and you'll win."

"Go on, Chicot," said the King.

"Yes, sire," returned the jester. "In that house Chicot had a mistress, a good and charming girl; nay, more, a lady, for that matter. One night that he visited her, a jealous prince had the house surrounded, had Chicot seized and beaten so roughly that Chicot was forced to jump from yon little balcony into the street. Now, as it was a miracle that Chicot was not killed, every time that Chicot passes in front of that house he kneels and prays, and, in his prayer, thanks the Lord for his escape."

"Poor Chicot! And you were finding fault with him, sire; in my opinion he has been really acting like a good Christian in all he has done."

"So you got quite a drubbing, my poor Chicot?"

"Yes, sire, quite a drubbing; but I am sorry it was n't worse."

“Why?”

“I should have liked if a few sword-cuts had been added.”

“For your sins?”

“No, for M. de Mayenne’s.”

“Ah, I understand; your intention is to render unto Cæsar”—

“No, not Cæsar; don’t confuse things, sire. Cæsar is the great general, valiant warrior, the eldest brother, the person who would be King of France; no, he has to reckon with Henri de Valois; pay your own debts, my son, and I’ll pay mine.”

Henri was not fond of hearing of his cousin the Duc de Guise; consequently, he became so grave during the rest of the time it took them to reach Bicêtre that the conversation was not renewed.

The journey from the Louvre to Bicêtre had occupied three hours; the optimists were ready to wager that they would be at Fontainebleau the next day, while the pessimists were equally ready to bet that they could not get there until noon the day after.

Chicot insisted that they would never arrive at all.

Once outside of Paris, there was less confusion on the line of march, and the throng seemed to get along more comfortably; the morning was rather fine, the wind less stormy, and the sun had at length succeeded in piercing through the clouds. The day was not unlike one of those breezy October days when the sound of the falling leaves comes to the ears of the traveller and his eyes dwell softly on the mysteries of the murmuring woods.

It was three in the evening when the procession reached the outer walls of Juvisy. From that point the bridge built over the Orge could be already seen, and also the Cour-de-France, a great hostelry which dispersed far and wide on the evening breeze the delicious odors of its kitchens and the joyous din of its customers.

Chicot’s nose seized these culinary emanations on the wing. He leaned out of the litter, and saw in the distance a number of men muffled up in fur cloaks. Among them was a short, fat personage whose broad-brimmed hat hid his face entirely.

These men entered hurriedly as soon as they saw the cortège.

But the stout little man did not go in quick enough to hinder Chicot’s eyes from getting a good view of him. He was hardly inside before the Gascon jumped from the royal litter, went for

his horse, which a page had charge of, and hid in a recess in one of the walls. It was now nearly nightfall, and the procession moved past him, on its way to Essonnes, where the King intended sleeping. When the last horseman had disappeared, when the distant sound of the wheels of the litter had died away, the jester left his place of concealment, stole to the other side of the castle, and then presented himself at the door of the hostelry, as if he had come from Fontainebleau. Before entering, Chicot glanced quickly through a window and saw with pleasure that the men he had remarked before were still in the inn; among them, the short, stout individual who had clearly attracted his special attention. But as Chicot had, seemingly, excellent reasons for avoiding the notice of the afore-said individual, instead of entering the room occupied by this personage, he ordered a bottle of wine to be brought to him in the room opposite, taking care to place himself in such a position that no one could come in unobserved by him.

Prudently selecting a dark nook in this apartment, Chicot was enabled to see everything in the other chamber, even a corner of the chimney, wherein was seated on a stool his short, stout man, who, evidently unconscious that he had to dread any investigation, allowed the warmth and glow of the bright fire in the grate to play on his face until it was bathed in a flood of light.

"I was not mistaken," murmured Chicot, "and when I was saying my prayer before the house in the Rue des Noyers, I felt as if I scented the return of that man. But why this return on the sly to the good city of our friend Herodes? Why did he hide when the King was passing? Ah! Pilate! Pilate! what if God, perchance, refused me the year I asked of him and forced me to a liquidation earlier than I thought of?"

Chicot had soon the delight of perceiving that he was favorably placed, not only to see but to hear, benefiting by one of those acoustic effects which chance sometimes capriciously produces. As soon as he noticed this, he listened now as intently as he had looked before.

"Gentlemen," said the stout little man to his companions, "I think it is time to leave; the last lackey passed a long time ago, and I am sure the road is now safe."

"Perfectly safe," answered a voice that made Chicot jump — a voice that proceeded from a body to which Chicot had not

heretofore paid any attention, being absorbed in the contemplation of the principal personage.

The individual to whom the body belonged from which this voice proceeded was as long as the person he addressed as "monseigneur" was short, as pale as the other was ruddy, as obsequious as the other was arrogant.

"Ha! Maître Nicolas," said Chicot to himself, laughing noiselessly: "*Tu quoque* — that's good. Our luck will be of the worst, if, this time, we separate without having a few words."

And Chicot emptied his glass and paid the score at once, so that nothing might delay him whenever he should feel like going.

It was a prudent forethought, for the seven persons who had attracted Chicot's attention paid in their turn, or, rather, the short, fat individual paid for all, and each of them, receiving his horse from a groom or lackey, leaped into the saddle. Then the little band started on the road to Paris and was soon lost in the evening fogs.

"Good!" said Chicot, "he is going to Paris; then I'll go there also."

And Chicot, mounting his horse, followed them at a distance, keeping their gray cloaks always in sight, or, when prudence held him back, taking care to be within reach of the echo of their horses' hoofs.

The cavalcade left the Fromenteau road, crossed the lands between it and Choisy, passed the Seine by the Charenton bridge, returned by the Porte Saint-Antoine, and, like a swarm of bees, was lost in the Hôtel de Guise, the gate of which closed on the visitors immediately, as if it had been kept open solely for their convenience.

"Good again!" said Chicot, hiding at a corner in the Rue des Quatre-Fils; "Guise is in this as well as Mayenne. At first the thing was only queer; now it is becoming interesting."

And Chicot lay in wait a full hour, in spite of the cold and hunger that were beginning to bite him with their sharp teeth. At last the gate opened; but instead of seven cavaliers muffled up in cloaks, it was seven monks of Sainte Geneviève, muffled up in cowls, that appeared, with enormous rosaries rattling at their sides.

"Upon my word!" thought Chicot, "this is a change with

a vengeance ! Is the Hôtel de Guise so embalmed in holiness that sinners are metamorphosed into saints by merely crossing its threshold ? The thing grows more and more interesting."

And Chicot followed the monks as he had followed the cavaliers, not having the least doubt but that the frocks covered the same bodies the cloaks had covered lately.

The monks passed the Seine at Nôtre-Dame bridge, crossed the Cité, marched over the Petit-Pont, cut through the Place Maubert, and ascended the Rue Sainte-Geneviève.

"Ugh !" gasped Chicot, as he doffed his cap before the house in the Rue des Noyers where he had said his prayer in the morning, "are we actually returning to Fontainebleau ? In that case I haven't taken the shortest route. But no, I am mistaken, we're not going so far."

To show that his surmise was correct, the monks halted at the gate of the Abbey of St. Geneviève and were soon lost in the porch, within which another monk of the same order might have been seen attentively examining the hands of those who entered.

"*Tudieu !*" thought Chicot, "it seems that to get inside this convent you must have your hands clean. Decidedly, something extraordinary is happening."

After this reflection, Chicot, rather puzzled to know what to do to keep the persons he was following in sight, looked round. What was his amazement to see all the streets full of hoods, and all these hoods advancing to the abbey, some in couples, some in groups, but all converging to the same point.

"Aha !" muttered Chicot, "there must be a meeting of the general chapter to-night in the abbey, and all the Genevievans in France have been summoned to take part in it ! Upon my faith, for the first time in my life I'd like to be present at a chapter."

The monks, after entering the porch, showed their hands, or rather something in their hands, and passed.

"I certainly should be nothing loth to pass in with them also," said Chicot to himself ; "but two things are essential : first, the venerated robe that enfolds them, for, to my eyes, there is no laic among these holy personages ; and secondly, that thing they show the brother porter, for, assuredly, they are showing something. Ah ! Brother Gorenflot ! Brother Gorenflot ! if I could only lay my hand on thee, my worthy friend !"

This apostrophe was extracted from Chicot by the recollection of one of the most venerable monks of the Order of St. Geneviève, Chicot's usual table-companion when Chicot did not happen to eat at the Louvre, in good sooth, the very person with whom our Gascon had eaten widgeon and drunk spiced wine in the restaurant by the Porte Saint-Martin on the day of the procession of the penitents.

Meantime, the monks continued to arrive in such numbers that it almost looked as if half Paris had donned the frock, while the brother porter scrutinized them as closely as ever.

"Odzookens!" said Chicot to himself, "there is surely something out of the way occurring to-night. I must keep my curiosity on the go to the end. It's half-past seven; Brother Gorenflot must be through with his alms-collecting. I'll find him at the *Corne d'Abondance*, it is his hour for supper."

Leaving the legion of monks to perform their evolutions in the neighborhood of the abbey and afterward to disappear within its portals, and setting his horse to a gallop, he gained the Rue Saint-Jacques, where, facing the cloister of Saint-Benoit, rose the flourishing hostelry of the *Corne d'Abondance*, a favorite resort of the monks and scholars.

Chicot was not known in the house as a regular customer, but rather as one of those mysterious guests who came occasionally to squander a gold crown and a scrap of their sanity in the establishment of Maître Claude Bonhomet, for so was named the dispenser of the gifts of Ceres and Bacchus poured out without cessation from the famous cornucopia that served as the sign of the house.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN WHICH THE READER MAKES BROTHER GORENFLOT'S ACQUAINTANCE.

To a lovely day had succeeded a lovely night; except that, cold as had been the day, the night was colder still. The vapor exhaled by the breathing of the belated citizens, tinged with red by the glare of the lamps, could be seen condensing under their hats; the footsteps of the passers-by on the frozen ground could be distinctly heard, as well as the vigorous *hum*, extracted by the chilliness of the season and "reverberated by

the elastic surfaces," as a professor of physics would say at the present day. In a word, it was one of those nice spring frosts that add a double charm to the rosy tints which shine on the panes of a hostelry.

Chicot first entered the dining-room, peered into every nook and corner, and, not finding the man he sought among Maître Claude's guests, he passed familiarly into the kitchen.

The master of the establishment was reading a pious book, while a little pool of grease in a huge frying-pan was trying to attain the degree of heat necessary for the introduction of several whittings, dusted with flour, into the said pan.

At the noise made by Chicot's entrance, Maître Bonhommet raised his head.

"Ah, it's you, monsieur," said he, closing his book. "Good evening and a good appetite to you."

"Thanks for both your wishes, although one of them is made as much for your own profit as for mine. But that will depend."

"Will depend! how?"

"You know I don't like eating by myself?"

"Oh, if you like, I'll sup with you."

"Thanks, my dear host, I know you're a capital companion; but I am looking for some one."

"Brother Gorenflot, perhaps?" asked Bonhommet.

"The very person," answered Chicot; "has he begun his supper yet?"

"No, not yet; still, you had better make haste."

"Why?"

"Because he'll have finished it in five minutes."

"Brother Gorenflot has not begun his supper and will have finished in five minutes, you say?"

And Chicot shook his head, which, in every country in the world, is accepted as a sign of incredulity.

"Monsieur," said Maître Claude, "to-day is Wednesday, and we are beginning Lent."

"And suppose you are," said Chicot in a tone that proved he was rather dubious as to the religious emotions of Gorenflot, "what follows?"

"Humph!" answered Claude, with a gesture which clearly meant: "I'm in the dark as much as you are, but so it is."

"Decidedly," muttered Chicot, "there must be something wrong with this sublunary sphere. Five minutes for Goren-

flot's supper! It was fated that I should witness miracles to-day."

And with the air of a traveller whose feet have touched an unknown country, Chicot made his way to a private room, and pushed open a glass door, over which hung a woollen curtain checkered in white and red. Away at the back, he perceived by the light of a sputtering candle the worthy monk, who was listlessly turning over on his plate a scanty morsel of spinach which he essayed to render more savory by blending with this herbaceous substance a fragment of Surènes cheese.

While the excellent brother is working at this mixture, with a sullen expression that augurs badly for the success of the combination, let us try to depict his personality so completely and veraciously for the benefit of our readers as in some sort to recompense them for their misfortune in not having already made his acquaintance.

Brother Gorenflot was thirty-eight years old, and five feet high, by standard measure. His stature, a little scanty perhaps, was made up for, as he was in the habit of stating himself, by the admirable harmony of the proportions; for what he lost in height he gained in breadth, measuring nearly three feet in diameter from shoulder to shoulder, which, as every one should know, is equivalent to nine feet in circumference.

From the centre of these herculean shoulders rose a thick neck intersected by muscles as big as your thumb and standing out like cords. Unfortunately, the neck harmonized with the other proportions, by which we mean that it was very bulky and very short, and it was to be feared that any great emotion would result in apoplexy for Brother Gorenflot. But, being perfectly conscious of this defect and of the danger to which it exposed him, Brother Gorenflot never allowed any strong emotion to get the better of him; it was, in fact, very seldom — we are bound to make this statement — that he was as visibly thrown off his balance to such an extent as he was at the moment when Chicot entered his room.

"Hello! my friend, what are you doing there?" cried our Gascon, looking alternately at the vegetables, at Gorenflot, and then at the unsnuffed candle and at a goblet filled to the brim with water, tinted by a few drops of wine.

"You see for yourself, my brother. I am having my supper," replied Gorenflot, in a voice as resonant as that of the bell of the abbey.

"You call that supper, Gorenflot? Herbs, cheese? Oh, pshaw!" cried Chicot.

"This is the first Wednesday of Lent; let us think of our souls, my brother, let us think of our souls!" answered Gorenflot, in a nasal twang, raising his eyes sanctimoniously to heaven.

Chicot was completely taken aback; his looks indicated that he had once seen Gorenflot glorify the holy season on which they were entering in quite a different manner.

"Our souls!" he cried, "and what the devil have herbs and water to do with our souls?"

"On Friday meat thou shalt not eat,
And not on Wednesday, either,"

said Gorenflot.

"At what hour did you breakfast?"

"I have not breakfasted, brother," he replied, in a tone that was growing more and more nasal.

"Oh, if your religion consists in speaking through your nose, I can beat any monk in Christendom at that game. And if you have not been breakfasting, my brother," said Chicot, with a snuffle that at once challenged comparison with that of Brother Gorenflot, "what, in the name of mercy, have you been doing?"

"I have been composing a sermon," answered Gorenflot, proudly raising his head.

"Oh, nonsense! a sermon, indeed! and what for?"

"To be delivered to-night in the abbey."

"Stay!" thought Chicot. "A sermon to-night? That's queer."

"It is about time for me to leave," said Gorenflot, taking his first mouthful of the spinach and cheese, "it's time for me to think of returning, the congregation may get impatient."

Chicot remembered the crowd of monks he had seen on the way to the abbey, and as M. de Mayenne was, in all probability, among these monks, he wondered how it was that Gorenflot, whose eloquence had not been heretofore one of his titles to fame, had been selected by his superior, Joseph Foulon, the then Abbot of Sainte Geneviève, to preach before the Lorraine prince and such a numerous assembly.

"Pshaw!" said he. "When do you preach?"

"Between nine and half-past nine, brother."

"Good! it's only a quarter to nine now. Surely you can give me five minutes. *Ventre de biche!* It's more than a week since we had a chance of hobnobbing together."

"That has not been your fault," said Gorenflot, "and our friendship has not been lessened thereby, I assure you, my beloved brother. The duties of your office keep you at the side of our great King Henri III., whom God preserve; the duties of mine impose upon me the task of collecting alms, and, after that, of praying; it is not astonishing, then, that our paths should lie apart."

"True," said Chicot, "but, *corbeuf!* is n't that the more reason why, when we do meet, we should be jolly?"

"Oh, I am as jolly as jolly can be," answered Gorenflot, in a tone that was almost heart-broken, "but that does not render it the less necessary for me to leave you."

And the monk attempted to rise.

"At least finish your herbs," said Chicot, laying a hand on his shoulder and forcing him to sit down again.

Gorenflot gazed on the spinach and heaved a sigh.

Then his eyes happening to fall on the colored water, he turned away his head.

Chicot saw it was time to begin operations.

"So you remember the little dinner I was just speaking about?" said he. "Yes, it was, you know, at the Porte Montmartre, where, while our great King Henri III. was belaboring himself and others, we were eating widgeons from the Grange-Batelière marshes, garnished with crabs, and were drinking that nice Burgundy, — what's this its name was? — a wine, I think, you discovered yourself."

"It was the wine of my native country, La Romanée," answered Gorenflot.

"Ah, yes, now I recollect, the milk you sucked after making your appearance in this world, O worthy son of Noah!"

With a sad smile, Gorenflot licked his lips.

"What have you to say about the wine?" asked Chicot.

"It was good; but there is better," answered the monk.

"Just what our host, Claude Bonhommet, declared some time ago; he claims he has fifty bottles in his cellar compared to which that we drank at the Porte Montmartre was but sour vinegar."

"He speaks the truth," said Gorenflot.

"What! the truth, does he?" cried Chicot, "and here you

are drinking that abominable red water when you have only to hold out your hand for wine like that! Faugh!”

And Chicot seized the goblet and flung its contents out of the room.

“There is a time for everything, my brother,” said Gorenflot. “Wine is good when we have nothing to do after we drink it except glorify the God who made it; but when you have to preach a sermon, water is to be preferred, not because of its taste, but for its utility: *facunda est aqua*.”

“Bah!” retorted Chicot. “*Magis facundum est vinum*, and the proof of it is that I, who have also a sort of sermon to preach, and have the utmost faith in my prescription, am going to order a bottle of that same La Romanée; and, by the way, what would you advise me to have with it, Gorenflot?”

“Don’t have any of those herbs with it, at all events; they’re nauseous.”

“Faugh, faugh,” exclaimed Chicot, as he seized Gorenflot’s plate and carried it to his nose, “faugh!”

And, thereupon, opening a little window, he hurled both herbs and plate into the street.

Then turning back:

“Maître Claude!” he cried.

The host, who had been probably listening at the door, appeared at once.

“Maître Claude,” said Chicot, “bring me two bottles of the Romanée which you hold to be better than anybody’s.”

“Two bottles!” said Gorenflot: “why two, as I don’t drink?”

“If you were drinking, I’d order four, or five, or six; I’d order all there are in the house,” said Chicot. “But when I drink by myself, I’m but a poor drinker, and two bottles will be enough for me.”

“In fact, two bottles are moderate, and if you eat no meat with them, your confessor will not quarrel with you.”

“Oh, fie, fie!” said Chicot, “to hint at any one’s eating meat on a Wednesday in Lent!”

And making his way to the larder, while Maître Bonhomet was making his way to the cellar, he drew therefrom a fine fat pullet of the Mans breed.

“What are you doing there?” said Gorenflot, who could not help taking an interest in the Gascon’s movements; “what are you doing there, my brother?”

"Why, you see! I'm appropriating this carp for fear some one else might lay his hands on it. During the Wednesday of Lent there's always a fierce competition for these sorts of comestibles."

"A carp!" cried the astounded monk.

"A carp beyond doubt," said Chicot, holding the succulent fowl up before his eyes.

"And how long is it since a carp had a beak?" asked Gorenflot.

"A beak?" exclaimed the Gascon; "you mean a mouth!"

"And wings?" continued the monk.

"Fins."

"And feathers?"

"Scales. My dear Gorenflot, you must be drunk."

"Drunk!" cried Gorenflot, "I drunk! A likely thing, indeed! I who have eaten only herbs and drunk only water."

"Nothing surprising. The spinach has upset your stomach and the water has gone to your head."

"Well, here is our host; he'll settle it."

"Settle what?"

"Whether it is a carp or a pullet."

"Agreed, but first let him uncork the wine. I want to see if it is the same. Uncork, Maître Claude."

Maître Bonhommet uncorked a bottle and poured out half a glass for Chicot.

Chicot swallowed it off and smacked his lips.

"Ah!" said he, "I am a poor taster and my tongue has no memory. It is impossible for me to tell if it's worse or better than that we drank at the Porte Montmartre. I am not sure even but that it is the same."

Gorenflot's eyes sparkled as they rested on the couple of ruby drops still left in the bottom of Chicot's glass.

"Now, my good brother," said Chicot, pouring a thimbleful of wine into the monk's glass, "you are placed in this world for the good of your neighbor; enlighten me."

Gorenflot took the glass, raised it to his lips, and slowly swallowed the small quantity of liquid it contained.

"It's of the same country for certain," said he, "but" —

"But," repeated Chicot.

"I tasted too little to be sure whether it is better or worse."

"And yet I have such a longing to know," said Chicot. "Confound it! I do not like to be deceived, and only that

you have a sermon to preach, my brother, I should ask you to give this wine another trial."

"If it would be doing you a favor," said the monk.

"Would n't it, though!" rejoined Chicot.

And he half filled Gorenflot's glass.

Gorenflot raised the glass to his lips with the same solemnity as before, and sipped it with the same conscientious deliberation.

"It is better," said he, "better; I stake my reputation on that."

"Bah! you had an understanding with our host!"

"A good drinker ought, at the first draught, to recognize the wine, at the second the quality, at the third the age."

"Oh, the age," said Chicot; "I can't tell you how much I should like to know the age of that wine!"

"The easiest thing in the world," replied the monk, holding out his glass, "just a few drops, and you'll know it."

Chicot filled three-fourths of the glass. Gorenflot swallowed it slowly, but without taking the glass from his lips.

"1561," said he, as he put the glass back on the table.

"Hurrah!" cried Claude Bonhomet, "1561; that's the naked truth."

"Brother Gorenflot," said the Gascon, doffing to him, "Rome has canonized many who were not as deserving of the honor as you."

"Oh," said Gorenflot modestly, "it is partly the result of experience."

"And of genius!" asserted Chicot. "Experience alone could never achieve such results. I'm a living proof of that, for my experience has not, I venture to say, been inconsiderable. But what are you doing now?"

"You see for yourself, I'm getting up."

"Why?"

"To meet my congregation."

"Without eating a piece of my carp?"

"Ah! true," said Gorenflot; "it would seem, my worthy brother, that you know even less about eating than drinking. Maître Bonhomet, please tell us what is that creature?"

And Brother Gorenflot pointed to the object under discussion.

The innkeeper stared in bewilderment at his questioner.

"Yes," repeated Chicot, "we want to know what is that creature."

"Why," said mine host, "it is a pullet."

"A pullet!" exclaimed Chicot, with an air of dismay.

"And a Mans pullet at that," continued Bonhomet.

"Now what have you to say?" said Gorenflot, triumphantly.

"What have I to say?" returned Chicot. "Why, that I am apparently in error; but, as I have a real longing to eat of this pullet, and yet would not sin, do me the favor, my brother, in the name of our mutual friendship, to sprinkle a few drops of water on it and christen it carp."

"Oh, really!" protested Brother Gorenflot.

"Do it, I beseech you!" said the Gascon, "do it; you will thereby, perhaps, save me from a mortal sin."

"Well, to save you from a mortal sin — agreed!" said Gorenflot, who, besides being naturally an excellent comrade, had had his spirits elevated a little by his three vinous experiments, "but I don't see any water."

"I know it is written, though I forget where: 'In a case of urgency thou shalt use whatever comes to thy hand; everything is in the intension.' Baptize with wine, my brother, baptize with wine; the creature will not be the worse on that account, though it may be a little less Catholic."

And Chicot filled the monk's glass to the brim. The first bottle was finished.

"In the name of Bacchus, Momus, and Comus, trinity of the great Saint Pantagrue!" said Gorenflot, "I baptize thee carp."

And, steeping his finger-tips in the wine, he sprinkled a few drops on the pullet.

"Now," said the Gascon, touching glasses with the monk, "to the health of the newly baptized; may she be roasted to perfection, and may the art of Maître Claude Bonhomet add other priceless qualities to those she has received from nature."

"To his health," said Gorenflot, interrupting a hearty laugh to swallow the Burgundy Chicot poured out for him, "to his health. *Morbleu!* but that's a wine that's up to the mark."

"Maître Claude," said Chicot, "roast me incontinent this carp on the spit, baste it with fresh butter, into which you will shred a little bacon and some shalots; then, when it hath begun to turn a golden brown, slip me into the pan two slices of toast, and serve hot."

Gorenflot spoke not a word, but he looked approbation,

which approbation was confirmed by a certain little motion of the head, peculiar to him.

"And now," said Chicot, when he saw his orders in a fair way of being executed, "sardines, Maître Bonhommet, and some tunny. We are in Lent, as our pious brother has just told us, and only Lenten fare will I touch. So, — stay a moment, — bring on two more bottles of that excellent Romanée, 1561."

The perfumes that arose from the kitchen, one of those kitchens of the south so dear to the true gourmand, were beginning to be diffused around; they gradually mounted to the brain of the monk; his tongue became moist and his eyes shone, but he restrained himself still, and even made a movement to get up.

"So, then," said Chicot, "you leave me thus, and at the very beginning of the battle?"

"I must, my brother," said Gorenflot, lifting up his eyes to heaven to notify God of the sacrifice he was making for His sake.

"But it is terribly imprudent of you to think of preaching when you're fasting."

"Why?" stammered the monk.

"Because your lungs will fail you, my brother; Gallien has said: *Pulmo hominis facile deficit* — Man's lungs are weak and easily fail."

"Alas! yes," said Gorenflot, "and it has often been my own experience; had I had lungs, I should have been a thunderbolt of eloquence."

"You see I'm right, then," returned Chicot.

"Luckily," said Gorenflot, falling back on his chair, "luckily, I have zeal."

"Yes, but zeal is not enough; in your place I should try these sardines and drink a few drops of this nectar."

"A single sardine, then," replied Gorenflot, "and just one glass."

Chicot laid a sardine on the brother's plate and passed him the second bottle.

The monk ate the sardine and drank the contents of the glass.

"Well?" asked Chicot, who, while urging the Genevievean to eat and drink, took good care to keep sober himself: "well, how do you feel?"

"The fact is," answered Gorenflot, "I feel a little stronger."

"*Ventre de biche!* when a fellow has a sermon to preach, it is not a question of feeling a little stronger, it's a question of feeling entirely strong, and," continued the Gascon, "in your place, if I wanted to achieve this result I should eat the two fins of this carp; for if you do not eat, your breath is pretty sure to smell of wine. *Merum sobrio male olet.*"

"Ah!" exclaimed Gorenflot, "devil take me if you're not right. I never thought of that."

The pullet was brought in at this very moment. Chicot carved one of the portions he had baptized by the name of fins; the monk ate it, and picked a leg and thigh afterward.

"Christ's body!" he cried, "but this is the delicious fish!"

Chicot cut off another fin and laid it on Gorenflot's plate, he himself toying with a bone.

"And the famous wine," said he, uncorking a third bottle.

Once started, once warmed up, once quickened in the depths of his huge stomach, Gorenflot no longer had the strength to stop; he devoured the wing, made a skeleton of the carcass, and then summoned Bonhomet.

"Maître Claude," said he, "I am very hungry; did you not suggest a certain bacon omelet?"

"Undoubtedly," answered the innkeeper, who never contradicted his customers when their assertions had a tendency to increase the length of their bills.

"Then bring it on, bring it on immediately," said the monk.

"In five minutes," replied the host, who, at a glance from Chicot, left hurriedly to prepare the order.

"Ah!" cried Gorenflot, dropping his enormous fist, which was armed with a fork, on the table, "things are going better now."

"I should think so!" said Chicot.

"And if the omelet were here I'd make only a mouthful of it, just as I swallow this wine at a gulp."

And his liquorish eyes gleamed as he tossed off a quarter of the third bottle.

"Aha!" said Chicot, "so you were ill, my friend?"

"I was a ninny, my brother," returned Gorenflot; "that cursed sermon drove me crazy; I have thought of nothing else for the last three days."

"It must be magnificent?" said Chicot.

"Splendid."

"Tell me about it while we're waiting for the omelet."

"No, no!" cried Gorenflot; "a sermon at table! where did you ever hear of such a thing? at your royal master's court, Mister Jester?"

"Oh, I have heard some very fine discourses at the court of King Henri, whom God preserve!" said Chicot, raising his hat.

"And on what do those discourses turn?" inquired Gorenflot.

"On virtue," said Chicot.

"Oh, yes," cried the monk, throwing himself back in his chair, "he is quite a paragon of virtue, is your King Henri."

"I don't know if he be a paragon or not," rejoined the Gascon; "but what I do know is that I have never seen anything there to bring a blush to my cheeks."

"I believe you; *mordieu!* don't I believe you!" said the monk. "It is a long time since you could blush, you hardened sinner."

"I a sinner! Oh, fie!" said Chicot. "I who am abstinence personified, continence in flesh and bone! I who follow all the processions and observe all the fasts!"

"Yes, the hypocritical processions, the make-believe fasts of your Sardanapalus, your Nebuchadnezzar, your Herodes! Fortunately, we're beginning to know your King Henri by heart. May the devil take him!"

And Gorenflot, in place of the sermon asked for, sang the following song at the top of his voice:

"The King, to get money, pretends
That he 's poor, as if that made amends
For his shameful abuses
The hypocrite thinks that his sin
Is effaced when he scourges his skin
And fasts like recluses.

"But Paris, who knows him too well,
Would far sooner see him in hell
Than lend him a copper.
He filched from her so much before,
That she says: "You pay off the old score,
Or go begging, you pauper!"

"Bravo!" cried Chicot, "bravo!"

Then, to himself:

"Good! since he sings, he'll speak."

At this moment, Maître Bonhommet entered, in one hand the famous omelet, and in the other two fresh bottles.

“Bring it here, bring it here,” cried the monk, with sparkling eyes and with a smile so broad that it revealed all his thirty-two teeth.

“But, friend Gorenflot, it seems to me that you have to preach a sermon,” said Chicot.

“The sermon is here,” said the monk, slapping his forehead, which was already beginning to partake of the ruddy color of his cheeks.

“At half-past nine,” continued Chicot.

“I lied,” said the monk, — “*omnis homo mendax confiteor*.”

“Well, at what hour is it to take place?”

“At ten.”

“At ten? I thought the abbey closed at nine.”

“Let it close,” said Gorenflot, looking at the candle through the ruby contents of his glass; “let it close, I have a key.”

“The key of the abbey!” cried Chicot, “you have the key of the abbey?”

“Here, in my pocket,” said Gorenflot, tapping a part of his robe.

“Impossible,” answered Chicot, “I know what monastic rules are. I have made retreats in three convents: the key of an abbey is never confided to a mere brother.”

“Here it is,” said Gorenflot, falling back in his chair, and holding up a coin exultingly before the eyes of Chicot.

“Let me see. Hah! money,” sneered Chicot; “you corrupt the brother porter and return at whatever hour you like, you miserable sinner!”

Gorenflot opened his mouth from ear to ear, with that idiotic, good-natured smile peculiar to the drunkard.

“*Sufficit*,” he stammered.

And he was hurriedly restoring the coin to his pocket.

“Stay,” said Chicot, “hold a moment. Bless my eyes! what a queer coin!”

“With the effigy of the heretic on it,” said Gorenflot. “Look — a hole through the heart.”

“Yes, I see,” answered Chicot, “a tester minted by the Béarn monarch; and the hole is there, too.”

“Made by a poniard!” said Gorenflot. “Death to the heretic! Whoever kills the heretic is canonized before his death, and I freely give up my place in paradise to him.”

“Oho!” muttered Chicot, “things are beginning to take shape; but the rascal is not yet drunk enough.”

And he filled the monk's glass again.

"Yes," cried the Gascon, "death to the heretic! and long live the Mass!"

"Long live the Mass!" said Gorenflot, gulping down the contents of his glass, "death to the heretic, and long live the Mass!"

"So!" said Chicot, who, at sight of the tester in his comrade's enormous hand, remembered the careful examination made by the brother porter of the hands of the monks who had flocked to the abbey porch, "so you show this coin to the brother porter — and" —

"I enter," said Gorenflot.

"Without trouble?"

"As easily as this wine enters my stomach."

And the monk treated himself to a fresh dose of the generous liquid.

"Why, then, if what you say is correct, you haven't to steal in?"

"I steal in!" stammered Gorenflot, now completely intoxicated: "when Gorenflot arrives, the folding-doors are opened wide before him."

"And then you deliver your sermon?"

"And then I deliver my sermon: here is how the thing is managed: I arrive, do you hear? I ar-rive — Chi-cot!"

"I should say I hear: I'm all ears."

"I arrive, then, as I was telling you. The congregation is numerous and select: there are barons; there are counts; there are dukes."

"And even princes."

"And even princes," repeated the monk: "you're right — princes, in good earnest. I enter humbly among the faithful of the Union; there is a cry for Brother Gorenflot, and I come forward."

And thereupon the monk rose.

"That's just it," said Chicot, "you come forward."

"And I come forward," repeated Gorenflot, trying to be as good as his word. But, before he made the first step, he stumbled at a corner of the table and fell in a heap on the floor.

"Bravo!" cried the Gascon, lifting him up and setting him on a chair; "you come forward, you bow to your audience, and say" —

"No, I don't say, it is my friends who say."

"Your friends say what?"

"My friends say: 'Brother Gorenflot! Brother Gorenflot's sermon!' A fine name for a Leaguer is Gorenflot, is n't it?"

And the good monk repeated his name in tones of admiring approval.

"A fine name for a Leaguer," said Chicot to himself; "what truths is the wine in this drunkard going to let out?"

"Then I begin."

And the monk rose to his feet, shutting his eyes because the light hurt them, leaning against the wall because he was dead drunk.

"You begin," said Chicot, propping him against the wall as Paillasse does Harlequin in the pantomime.

"I begin: 'My brethren, this is a fine day for the faith; my brethren, this is a very fine day for the faith; my brethren, this is an exceedingly fine day for the faith.'"

After this superlative, Chicot saw there was nothing more to be got out of the monk; so he let him go.

Brother Gorenflot, who owed his equilibrium solely to the support of Chicot, slipped along the wall like a badly shored plank as soon as that support was withdrawn, hitting the table with his feet as he fell and knocking several empty bottles off it by the shock.

"Amen!" said Chicot.

Almost at that very instant, a snore like unto a roar of thunder shook the window of the narrow apartment.

"Good!" said Chicot, "the pullet's legs are beginning their work. Our friend is in for a good twelve hours' sleep, and I can undress him easily."

Judging there was no time to lose, Chicot loosened the cords of the monk's robe, pulled it off, and, turning Gorenflot over as if he had been a sack of flour, rolled him in the table-cloth, tied a napkin about his head, and, with the monk's frock hid under his cloak, passed into the kitchen.

"Maître Bonhomet," said he, handing the innkeeper a rose noble, "that 's for our supper; and this one is for the supper of my horse, which I commend to your good graces; and this other one, particularly, is donated with the intention that you awake not the worthy Brother Gorenflot, who sleepeth like one of the elect."

"Do not be uneasy, all shall be done as you have requested,

M. Chicot," answered the innkeeper, to show these requests were rendered palatable by what accompanied them.

Trusting to this assurance, Chicot departed, and, being as fleet as a deer and as keen-eyed as a fox, he was soon at the corner of the Rue Saint-Étienne. There, with the Béarn tester clutched firmly in his right hand, he donned the brother's robe, and, at a quarter to ten, took his station, not without a beating heart, at the wicket of the abbey of Sainte-Geneviève.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOW CHICOT FOUND IT EASIER TO GET INTO THE ABBEY OF SAINTE GENEVIÈVE THAN TO GET OUT OF IT.

Chicot, before donning the monk's frock, had taken a very useful precaution: it was to increase the width of his shoulders by a clever arrangement of his cloak and of the other garments which his new vestment rendered unnecessary; his beard was of the same color as Gorenflot's, and, although one had been born on the banks of the Saone and the other on those of the Garonne, he had so often mimicked his friend's voice for his own amusement that his imitation of it was now perfection. And, of course, every one knows that the beard and voice are the only things that can be distinguished under the hood of a Capuchin.

The gate was near closing when Chicot arrived, the brother porter only waiting for a few loiterers. The Gascon showed his coin, with its effigy of the King of Béarn pierced through the heart, and was at once admitted. He followed the two monks who went before him, and entered the convent chapel, with which he was well acquainted, having often gone there with the King; for the King had taken the abbey of Sainte Geneviève under his special protection.

The chapel was Roman in style, which is the same as saying that it had been erected in the eleventh century, and that, like all the chapels of that period, its choir was built over a crypt or subterranean church. As a consequence, the choir was eight or ten feet higher than the nave. The entrance to it was by two side staircases, between which was an iron door open-

ing on a staircase containing the same number of steps as the two others, and leading to the crypt.

In this choir, which rose higher than the altar and the picture of St. Geneviève — attributed to Rosso — suspended above it, were the statues of Cloris and Clotilde.

The chapel was lighted by only three lamps, one hanging from the centre of the choir, the two others in the nave.

This imperfect light gave a greater solemnity to the interior, apparently doubling its proportions, for the imagination has a tendency to magnify objects seen in the shadow.

At first, Chicot found it somewhat difficult to accustom his eyes to the obscurity; to train them, he began counting the monks. There were one hundred and twenty in the nave and twelve in the choir, in all a hundred and thirty-two. The twelve monks in the choir were ranged in a single row before the altar, and seemed to be guarding the tabernacle, like a file of sentinels.

Chicot was glad to discover that he was not the last to join those whom Brother Gorenflot had called the brothers of the Union. Behind him entered three other monks, clad in their ample gray robes, who took their places in front of the line we have compared to a file of sentinels.

A boyish little monk, whom Chicot had not noticed before, and who was doubtless one of the choristers, went round on a tour of inspection to see that every one was at his post; then he spoke to one of the three last arrivals in front of the altar.

"We are one hundred and thirty-six," said the brother addressed, in a strong voice; "it is God's reckoning."

The hundred and twenty monks kneeling in the nave rose immediately and sat down on chairs or in the stalls. Soon the rattling of bolts and bars and hinges announced that the massive doors were being closed.

It was not without some trepidation that Chicot, brave as he was, heard those grating sounds. To give himself time to regain his composure, he went and sat down in the shadow of the pulpit; from there he could easily observe the three monks who seemed to be the most important persons in the assemblage.

Armchairs were brought them, in which they sat with the air of judges; behind them, the twelve monks of the choir stood in a line.

When the tumult occasioned by the shutting of the doors

and the changes in the postures of the monks had ceased, a little bell was rung three times.

It was doubtless the signal for silence; during the first and second tinkling of the bell, there was a prolonged "hush!" during the third, there was not even a whisper.

"Brother Monsoreau!" said the same monk who had already spoken, "what news do you bring from the province of Anjou?"

Two things made Chicot at once prick up his ears.

The first was the speaker's voice; its imperious tones would ring out far more naturally from the visor of a helmet on a field of battle than from the cowl of a monk in a church.

The second was this name of Monsoreau, a name only known a few days before at court, where, as we have seen, it had created some sensation.

A tall monk, whose robe fell about him in angular folds, made his way through the assembly and, with a firm and bold step, entered the pulpit. Chicot tried to get a glimpse of his features. But it was impossible.

"It's just as well," thought he; "if I cannot see their faces, at least, they can't see mine, either."

"My brothers," said a voice Chicot at once recognized as that of the grand huntsman, "the news from the province of Anjou is not satisfactory; not that we lack sympathizers there, but we do lack representatives. The task of propagating the Union in this province had been confided to Baron de Méridor; but this old man, driven to despair by the recent death of his daughter, has, owing to his sorrow, neglected the affairs of the holy League; until he is consoled for his loss, we need not count on him. As for myself, I bring three new adherents to the association. It is for you to decide whether these new brothers, for whom I answer as for myself, shall be admitted into our holy Union."

A murmur of approbation spread from rank to rank among the monks, and continued even after Brother Monsoreau had taken his seat.

"Brother La Hurière!" cried the same monk who had called on Monsoreau, and who, apparently, summoned such of the faithful as his own caprice suggested, "tell us what you have done in the city of Paris."

A man with his hood down took the place in the pulpit vacated by M. de Monsoreau.

"Brothers, you all know," said he, "whether I am devoted to the Catholic faith or not, and what proofs I gave of my devotion on the great day when it triumphed. Yes, my brothers, at that period I am proud to say I was one of the followers of our great Henri de Guise, and it was from the very mouth of M. de Besme himself, whom God reward, that I received the orders he deigned to give me, — orders I have obeyed so faithfully that I wanted to kill my own lodgers. Now my devotion to our holy cause has won me the post of leader of my district, and I venture to say that this will redound to the advantage of religion. I have been able to take note of all the heretics in the quarter of Saint-Germain-L'Auxerrois, where, in the Rue de l'Arbre Sec, I still keep the Hôtel de la Belle-Étoile, a hotel always at your service, my brothers ; and, when I took note of them, I pointed them out to our friends. Certainly, I no longer thirst for the blood of the Huguenots as I did once, but I cannot disguise from myself the true object of the holy Union we are about to found."

"This is worth listening to," said Chicot to himself. "La Hurière, if I remember aright, was a terrible heretic-killer and must have all the League's secrets at his fingers' ends, if these gentry are guided in their revelations by the merits of their confidants."

"Speak ! go on !" cried several voices.

La Hurière, having now an opportunity to display his oratorical powers, such as did not come to him often, although his faith in them was profound, paused to collect his thoughts, coughed, and resumed :

"If I be not mistaken, my brothers, the extinction of individual heretics is not our chief object at present ; the great aim of all good Frenchmen is to be assured that they shall not find heretics among the princes entitled by birth to govern them. Now, my brothers, what is our present position ? Francis II., who was zealous, died without children ; Charles IX., who was zealous, died without children : Henri III., whose acts and beliefs it is not for me to investigate, will probably die without children ; then there remains the Duc d'Anjou, who has no children, either, and seems to be lukewarm toward the holy League" —

Here the orator was interrupted by several voices, among which was heard that of the grand huntsman.

"Why lukewarm?" it said, "and what ground have you for this accusation against the prince?"

"I say lukewarm because he has not yet given in his adhesion to the League, although the illustrious brother who has just spoken promised it positively in his name."

"Who told you he has not done so," the speaker went on, "since there are new adherents? You have no right, in my opinion, to suspect any one, as long as the report is not made."

"You are right," answered La Hurière, "and I will wait a while longer; but, after the Duc d'Anjou, who is mortal and belongs to a family whose members, you must have noticed, die young, to whom will the crown fall? To the most ferocious of Huguenots, to a renegade, an apostate, to a Nebuchadnezzar."

Here, not murmurs, but frantic applause, interrupted La Hurière.

"To Henri de Béarn, in short, against whom this association is principally directed; to Henri de Béarn, generally supposed to be at Pau or Tarbes among his mistresses, but who is really to be met with here in Paris."

"In Paris!" cried several voices; "in Paris! oh, that is impossible."

"He was here!" said La Hurière. "He was here on the night Madame de Sauves was assassinated, and, very likely, he is here at this moment."

"Death to the Béarnais!" shouted several voices.

"Yes, death to the Béarnais!" cried La Hurière, "and, if by any chance, he should happen to put up at the Belle-Étoile, I'll answer for him: but he will not come. You do not catch a fox twice in the same hole. He will lodge elsewhere, with some friend, for he has friends, the heretic! Now, it is important to make short work of these friends or, at least, to know them. Our Union is holy, our League loyal, consecrated, blessed, and encouraged by our Holy Father Gregory XIII. I ask, then, that there be no longer any mystery made about it. I ask that lists be handed to the leaders in the different districts, and that these leaders go from house to house and invite all good citizens to sign them. Those who sign will be regarded as our friends; those who refuse to sign, as our enemies, and, when the need of a second Saint-Barthélemy—and it seems more urgent every day—arises, we will do what we did in the first one—we will spare God the labor of separating the good from the wicked."

The thunders of applause that followed this peroration lasted several minutes. At length there was silence, and the grave voice of the monk who had already spoken several times was heard saying :

"The proposition of Brother La Hurière, whom the holy Union thanks for his zeal, will be taken into consideration and discussed by the superior council."

The shouts of acclamation grew more vehement than ever; La Hurière bowed his acknowledgments repeatedly to the assembly, and then, coming down from the pulpit, went to his seat, almost crushed by the weight of his triumph.

"Aha!" murmured Chicot, "I think I am beginning to see. There are people who believe my son Henri is not as zealous a Catholic as was his brother Charles and as are the Guises, and so these same Guises are forming a little party which will be wholly under their hands. Thus, the great Henri, who is a general, will have the army; the fat Mayenne will have the citizens; and the illustrious cardinal will have the church; and, one fine morning, my poor son Henri will find he has nothing except his rosary, which they will politely invite him to take with him into some monastery or other. A capital plan, by Jupiter! But then, there is the Duc d'Anjou! — What the devil will they do with the Duc d'Anjou?"

"Brother Gorenflot!" said the voice of the monk who had already called upon the grand huntsman and La Hurière.

Whether because he was absorbed in the reflections we have just outlined for our readers, or because he was not yet accustomed to answer to the name which he had donned along with the frock of the begging friar, Chicot made no answer.

"Brother Gorenflot!" repeated the voice of the little monk, a voice so clear and shrill that it startled Chicot.

"Oho!" murmured Chicot. "I had almost thought a woman's voice was calling Brother Gorenflot. Would it be that in this honorable assembly not only ranks but sexes are confounded?"

"Brother Gorenflot," cried the same feminine voice again, "are you not present, then?"

"Ah!" whispered Chicot to himself, "I see it; I'm Brother Gorenflot. Well, so be it."

Then, aloud :

"Yes, yes, here I am," said he, counterfeiting the monk's nasal tones, "here I am. In such profound meditation did

the discourse of our brother La Hurière plunge me that I did not hear my name when called."

Several murmurs of approbation, evoked by the recollection of La Hurière's thrilling oration, arose and gave Chicot time to make some preparation for the ordeal he had to face.

Chicot, it may be said, might not have answered to the name of Gorenflot, since every hood was lowered. But it must be remembered that the number of those present was counted, and if, after an inspection, it was discovered that a man believed to be present was really absent, the situation of Chicot would have been serious indeed.

Chicot did not hesitate for an instant. He arose, assumed an air of great consequence, and slowly ascended the steps of the pulpit, meanwhile drawing his cowl down over his face as low as he could.

"Brethren," said he, in a voice that exactly resembled that of Brother Gorenflot, "I am the brother collector of this convent, and, as you know, this office gives me the right to enter every dwelling. It is a right of which I avail myself for God's service.

"Brethren," he continued, suddenly recalling the monk's exordium, which had been so unexpectedly interrupted by the slumber brought on by his too copious potations. — a slumber in whose potent clasp he still lay helpless, "brethren, the day that has drawn us all together here is a fine day for the faith. Let us speak frankly, my brethren, since we are in the house of the Lord.

"What is the kingdom of France? A body. Saint Augustine has said: '*Omnis civitas corpus est*': 'Every state is a body.' Upon what does the salvation of a body depend? Upon good health. How is the health of the body preserved? By prudent bleedings when it suffers from a plethora of strength. Now, it is evident that the enemies of the Catholic religion are too strong, since we are afraid of them; therefore we must again bleed that great body called Society. I am but repeating what is said to me every day by the faithful who supply me with eggs, hams, and money for my convent."

The first part of Chicot's discourse evidently made a lively impression upon his audience.

He paused until the murmurs of approval produced by his eloquence had died away, and then resumed:

"It may, perhaps, be objected that the Church abhors blood.

Ecclesia abhorret a sanguine. But mark this well, my dear brethren: the theologian does not say what kind of blood it is the Church holds in horror, and I am ready to bet an egg against an ox that, at any rate, he was not thinking of the blood of heretics when he spoke. For, just listen to this: *Fons malus corruptorum sanguis, hereticorum autem pessimus!* And then, another argument, my brethren: I mentioned the Church! But we are something beside the Church. Brother Monsoreau, who spoke so eloquently a few minutes ago, still keeps, I haven't a doubt about it, his grand huntsman's knife in his belt. Brother La Hurière can handle a spit with the greatest dexterity: *Veru agreste, lethiferum tamen instrumentum.* And I, too, my brethren, I who am now addressing you, I, even I, Jacques Népomucène Gorenflot, have shouldered a musket in Champagne and have roasted a Huguenot in my time. That would have been honor enough for me, and would have sufficed to gain Paradise, were it not that during that period I did other things that in the eyes of my confessor rather took from the merit of my act, and so I hastened to enter a monastery."

At this point Chicot was again applauded. He bowed modestly and continued:

"And now it remains for me to speak of the chiefs we have chosen. Certainly, it is very fine of you, and very prudent especially, to come here at night in monks' robes for the purpose of hearing Brother Gorenflot preach. But it seems to me that the duties of our great representatives ought not to stop at that. Such extreme prudence would but excite the mockery of those infernal Huguenots, who, it must be admitted, are the very devil at cutting and thrusting. I demand, then, that we assume an attitude more worthy of the brave men we are, or, at least, wish to appear. What is our object? The extinction of heresy — why there is nothing to prevent us from crying that from the housetops, as far as I can see. Why should we not march, then, through Paris as a holy procession, with heads erect and our halberds in our hands, instead of assembling like night-thieves who look around every corner to see if the watch be on their track? But you are, perhaps, asking, Who is the man that will set the example? Why, I myself! I, Jacques Népomucène Gorenflot, an unworthy brother of the Order of St. Geneviève, the humble collector of my convent, — I am ready, if need be, with a coat

of mail on my back, helm on head, and musket on shoulder, to march at the head of all good Catholics who desire to follow me, and this I will do, were it only to call a blush to the cheeks of leaders who, when defending the Church, hide in the dark as if she were some wanton whose quarrel they had espoused."

As Chicot's peroration was in harmony with the sentiments of many members of the League, who saw no surer way of attaining their object than by another Saint-Barthélemy, like the one that had occurred six years before, and who were driven to desperation by the slowness of their chiefs, his words aroused general enthusiasm, and all, except the three monks in front, cried out: "Long live the Mass! Hurrah for Brother Gorenflot! The procession! the procession!"

The enthusiasm was the more intense because it was the first time the worthy brother's zeal had been manifested in this fashion. Up to now his friends had no doubt ranked him among the zealous, but among that class of zealous people who are kept within the bounds of prudence by the instinct of self-preservation. And now, here was our brother Gorenflot armed for war and bounding into the full glare of the arena! It excited as much astonishment as admiration, and some, in their delight at such an unexpected transformation, were willing to place Brother Gorenflot, who had preached the first procession, on a level with Peter the Hermit, who had preached the First Crusade.

Luckily or unluckily for the originator of all this excitement, it did not chime in with the policy of the leaders to let him run his course. One of the three silent monks whispered to the little monk, and the lad's silvery voice immediately resounded under the vaults, crying:

"My brothers, it is time to retire: the sitting is over."

The monks rose, muttering that at the next meeting they would insist unanimously on the adoption of the proposal for a procession brought forward by worthy Brother Gorenflot, and made their way slowly to the door. Many of them approached the pulpit and congratulated the monk on his marvellous success: but Chicot, reflecting that his voice, which, in spite of him, always retained a slight Gascon flavor, might be recognized if heard too near, and that his body, being, when viewed vertically, six or eight inches taller than Brother Gorenflot's, might also, if seen too near, arouse the astonish-

ment of the observer, however much inclined to believe the moral expansion of the preacher had elevated his physical proportions, — Chicot, we say, fell upon his knees, and, like Sannet, seemed absorbed in a confidential conversation with the Lord.

His ecstacy was respected, and Chicot looked on at the exit of the monks from beneath his cowl, in which he had made holes for his eyes, with the greatest satisfaction.

And yet Chicot had very nearly failed in his object. It was the sight of the Duc de Mayenne that had induced him to leave Henri III. without even asking permission. It was the sight of Nicolas David that had made him return to Paris. Chicot, as we have said, had taken a double vow of vengeance; but he was too much of a nobody to think of attacking a prince of the house of Lorraine, at least without waiting long and patiently for the opportunity of doing so with safety. This was not the case with Nicolas David, who was a mere Norman lawyer; a crafty knave, though, who had been a soldier before being an attorney, and fencing-master in his regiment as well. Still, Chicot, even if not a fencing-master, had an idea that he did not handle the rapier badly; his great aim, then, was to come to close quarters with his enemy, when, like the doughty knights of old, he would trust in the justice of his cause and in his good sword.

Chicot examined all the monks closely, as they filed out after each other, hoping to detect, if it might be, under frock and cowl the lank, slender figure of Maitre Nicolas, when he suddenly perceived that each monk was submitted to the same examination on leaving as on entering, and was only allowed to depart when he had taken a certain token from his pocket and showed it the brother porter. Chicot at first thought he must be mistaken, and remained a moment in doubt; but this doubt was soon changed into a certainty that made his hair stand on end with terror.

Brother Gorenflot had shown him the token that would enable him to enter, but had forgotten to show him the token that would let him out.

CHAPTER XX.

HOW CHICOT SAW AND HEARD THINGS VERY DANGEROUS TO
SEE AND HEAR.

CHICOT came down from the pulpit hurriedly; he wanted to discover, if he could, the token that would enable him to get out into the street, and to obtain possession of it, if there was yet time. By mingling with the monks that still loitered behind, and peeping over their shoulders; he learned that this token was a star-shaped denier.

Our Gascon had a fair collection of deniers in his pocket, but, unfortunately, none of this peculiar form — a form the more peculiar that it destroyed forever the value of the coin as a circulating medium.

Chicot saw the situation at a glance. If he went to the door and did not produce the token, he was recognized to be an impostor. Nor would the investigation end with this: he would be found out to be Chicot, the King's jester, and although his office gave him many privileges in the Louvre and in the other royal castles, it would lose much of its prestige in the abbey of St. Genevieve, especially in the present circumstances. In fact, Maître Chicot saw that he was in a trap; he took refuge in the shadow of a pillar and crouched down in an angle made by a confession box with this pillar.

"To make things worse," said Chicot to himself, "my ruin will involve the ruin of that ninny of a king of mine, whom I am silly enough to be fond of, although I like to rap him over the knuckles occasionally. If I weren't a fool, I should be now in the hostelry of the *Corne d'Abondance*, enjoying myself with Brother Gorenflot; but no use wishing for impossibilities now."

And while thus addressing himself, that is to say, addressing the party who had most interest in keeping his words from unfriendly ears, he made himself as small as possible in the position he had taken.

Then the voice of the young chorister was heard from the court-yard, crying:

"Is every one out? We are going to shut the doors."

There was no answer. Chicot craned his neck, and saw

that the chapel was entirely empty except for the three monks who were seated on benches brought from the middle of the choir.

"Well," thought Chicot, "as long as they do not close the windows, things may go to my satisfaction."

"Let us go over the building," said the chorister to the brother porter.

"The devil!" said Chicot, "if I had that little monk by the neck, I would n't do a thing to him, oh no!"

The brother porter lit a taper and, followed by the chorister, began making the tour of the church.

There was not a moment to be lost. The brother porter would pass with his taper within four steps of Chicot, who could not fail to be discovered.

Chicot turned nimbly round the pillar, contriving to keep within the moving shadow; then he opened the door of the confessional, which was shut only by a latch, and slipped in, closing the door after him.

The brother porter and the monk passed within four paces of him, and he could see through the grating the light of the taper reflected on their robes.

"Unless the very devil's in it," thought Chicot, "that brother porter and the little monk and you three monks won't stay here forever. When they're out, I'll pile the chairs on the benches, like Pelion on Ossa, as M. Ronsard would say, and I'll make my way out through the window."

"Ah, yes, through the window," continued Chicot, answering a question he had put to himself, "but when I'm through the window I shall find myself in the yard, and the yard is not the street. I think, after all, it may be better for me to spend the night in the confessional. Gorenflot's robe is warm; it will not be as pagan a night as many I have passed, and so that much, at least, is gained for my salvation."

"Put out the lamps," said the chorister, "so that those outside may see the conference is at an end."

The brother porter, with the help of an immense extinguisher, immediately extinguished the light of the two lamps in the nave, plunging it into funeral darkness. Next he did the same to the one in the choir.

The church was now in total obscurity, except for the pale rays of a wintry moon that barely succeeded in piercing the stained-glass windows.

Then, with the cessation of the light, came utter silence.

The bell rang out twelve times.

"*Ventre de biche !*" said Chicot, "midnight in a church ! If my son Harry were in my place, would n't he be in a flutter ! Luckily we are so constituted that shadows don't frighten us. So good-night, friend Chicot, and a good rest to you !"

And, with this comforting wish addressed to himself, Chicot settled down with as much ease as he could in the confessional, shoved in the little bolt on the inside, to be more private, and shut his eyes.

He was in this situation about ten minutes, and his mind, assailed by the first misty visions of slumber, was half-conscious of a crowd of indefinite forms floating in that mysterious atmosphere which forms the twilight of thought, when three loud strokes on a copper gong pealed through the church, and then died away in its recesses.

"Odzookens !" mumbled Chicot, opening his eyes and pricking up his ears, "now, what may this mean ?"

At the same moment the lamp in the choir was relit, burning with a bluish flame, and in its reflection appeared the same three monks, seated in the same place and as motionless as ever.

Chicot was not entirely exempt from superstition. Brave as our Gascon was, he belonged to his age, and it was an age of weird traditions and terrible legends.

He crossed himself gently and murmured :

"*Vade retro, Satanas !*"

But as the light did not go out in obedience to the sign of our redemption, as it would most assuredly have done if it had been of an infernal character, and as the three monks stood their ground in spite of the "*vade retro*," the Gascon began to believe that the light might be natural, and the monks, if not real monks, at least beings of flesh and blood.

Still, what between his sudden awakening and his real alarm, Chicot was not himself for a time. And, at this very moment, a flagstone in the choir slowly rose until it stood on end, and a gray cowl appeared in the dark opening, and next, an entire monk stepped out on the floor, while the flagstone sank into its place behind him.

At this spectacle Chicot lost all confidence in himself. He no longer had any faith in the exorcism he had used before. He was simply frightened out of his wits, and for a moment

he dreaded that all the priors, abbots, and deans of St. Geneviève, from Optaf, who died in 533, to Pierre Boudin, the predecessor of the present superior, were about to leave their tombs in the crypt which formerly contained the relics of Sainte Geneviève, and, following the example already given them, to raise with their bony skulls the flagstones of the choir.

But this state of mind was not to last long.

"Brother Monsoreau," said one of the three monks to the individual who had made his appearance in such singular fashion, "has the person we are waiting for come?"

"Yes, messeigneurs," replied the monk spoken to, "he is outside."

"Open the door and let him enter."

"Aha," said Chicot, "so the comedy has two acts, and I only saw the first. Two acts! I hope to see a third."

But though Chicot tried to keep up his courage by joking with himself, he did not feel at all easy, and a cold shiver now and then darted through his veins.

Meanwhile Brother Monsoreau descended one of the stairs that led from the nave to the choir, and opened the bronze door between the two staircases by which the crypt was entered.

At the same time, the monk sitting between the two others lowered his hood, and showed the great scar, that noble sign by which the Catholics so enthusiastically used to recognize their hero, who was soon to become their martyr.

"The great Henri de Guise in person, the very individual his Most Besotted Majesty believes busy with the siege of La Charité! Ah, now I understand it all!" said Chicot; "the man on the right, who blessed the assembly, is the Cardinal de Lorraine, and the one on the left, who spoke to that brat of a chorister, is my friend Monseigneur de Mayenne. But where in the mischief is Maître Nicolas David?"

As if to give immediate proof of the soundness of Chicot's conclusions, the monks on the right and left lowered their cowls, and disclosed to view the intellectual features, broad forehead, and piercing eyes of the famous cardinal and the very commonplace visage of the Duc de Mayenne.

"Ha! Now I recognize you," said Chicot, — "a trinity rather unholy, but perfectly visible, and I am all eyes and ears, to see what you are going to do and hear what you are going to say."

At this moment M. de Monsoreau reached the iron door of the crypt, which gave way before him.

"Did you think he would come?" said the Balafré to his brother the cardinal.

"Not only did I think it, but I was so sure of it," said the latter, "that I have under my robe the very thing that is needed to take the place of the ampulla."

And Chicot, who was near enough the trinity, as he called them, to hear and see everything, perceived by the feeble light of the choir lamp a silver gilt, richly chased casket.

"Why, upon my faith," muttered Chicot, "it looks as if some one were going to be crowned. Now, as I have always longed to see a coronation, this will suit me exactly!"

Meanwhile, about a score of monks, with their heads buried in their enormous cowls, had entered by the door of the crypt and taken their stations in the nave.

They were followed by another monk, attended by M. de Monsoreau, who went up the choir staircase and occupied a position on the right of the Guises, standing on one of the steps of a stall.

The young chorister reappeared, went to the monk on the right, received his orders with an air of great respect, and then vanished.

The Duc de Guise's eyes wandered over this assembly, not one-sixth as numerous as the first, and, therefore, very likely to be a select body. Perceiving that they were not only attentive, but eager to hear him, he said:

"My friends, time is precious, and so I will go straight to the point. As I presume you all formed part of the first assembly, you must have heard the complaints of some members of the Catholic League, who accuse several of our leaders of coldness and even of ill-will, among others, the prince who is nearest to the throne. The moment has come to render to this prince the respect and justice we owe him. You will hear himself speak, and then those of you who have at heart the attainment of the principal object of the holy League can judge whether your chiefs deserve the imputation of coldness and apathy made by Brother Gorenflot, a member of our Union, but whom we have not deemed it prudent to admit into our secret."

When from his confessional Chicot heard the name of the warlike Genevievean uttered by the Duc de Guise in a tone

that denoted anything but friendliness, he could not help giving way to an inward fit of laughter, which, although silent, was certainly out of place, considering the great personages who were its object.

"Brothers," continued the duke, "the prince whose coöperation had been promised us, the prince whose aid, nay, whose mere assent, we scarcely dared to hope for, the prince, my brothers, is here."

All eyes were turned inquisitively on the monk to the right of the three Lorraine princes, who were all standing on the step of the stall.

"Monseigneur," said the Duc de Guise, addressing the personage who had now become the object of general attention, "the will of God seems to me manifest, for the fact that you have consented to join us proves that we are right in doing what we are doing. And now let me beseech your Highness to lower your hood, that your faithful followers may see with their own eyes you keep the promise we have given in your name, a promise so welcome that they hardly dared to hope for it."

The mysterious individual addressed by Henri de Guise raised his hand and flung his cowl back on his shoulders, and Chicot, who had expected to discover under a monk's frock some Lorraine prince hitherto unknown to him, was amazed on seeing the Duc d'Anjou, with a face so pale that, by the dim light of the sepulchral lamp, it looked as if it belonged to a marble statue.

"Oho!" said Chicot to himself, "our brother Anjou! So he will never have done staking the heads of others for a throne!"

"Long live Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou!" shouted the assembly.

François became even paler than he was before.

"Do not be alarmed, monseigneur," said Henri de Guise, "our chapel is deaf and its doors are well closed."

"A lucky precaution," thought Chicot.

"My brothers," said the Comte de Monsoreau, "his Highness wishes to address a few words to the meeting."

"Yes, yes, let him speak," cried every voice; "we are listening."

The three Lorraine princes turned round and bowed to the Duc d'Anjou. The Duc d'Anjou leaned against one of the arms of the stall; he seemed to be almost fainting.

"Gentlemen," said he, in a hollow voice that trembled to such a degree that his first words could barely be heard, "gentlemen, I believe that God, who often appears insensible and deaf to the affairs of this world, has, on the contrary, his piercing eyes always riveted on us and remains apparently dumb and careless, that he may remedy one day by some mighty stroke the disorders occasioned by the insane ambitions of men."

The beginning of the duke's speech was, like his character, somewhat obscure; so his hearers waited for a little light to descend on his Highness' thoughts before condemning or applauding them.

The duke resumed, in a somewhat firmer voice:

"I, too, have cast my eyes on this world, and being able to embrace but a small portion of its surface in my limited survey, I have concentrated my gaze on France. And what, pray, have I beheld in this kingdom? The holy religion of Christ shaken on its august foundations, and the true servants of God scattered and proscribed. Next, I have sounded the depths of the abyss opened for the last twenty years by heresies that undermine the faith under the pretence of getting nearer to God, and my soul, like that of the prophet, has been flooded with sorrows."

A murmur of approval ran through the assembly. The prince had manifested his sympathy for the sufferings of the Church; it was almost a declaration of war against those who made the Church suffer.

"In the midst of my profound affliction," went on the duke, "the news was brought me that several pious and noble gentlemen, devoted to the customs of our ancestors, were trying to steady the tottering altar. It seemed to me, as I looked around, that I was already present at the last judgment, and that God had separated the reprobate and the elect. On one side were the former, and I recoiled from them with horror; on the other were the elect, and I have come to throw myself into their arms. My brothers, I am here."

"Amen!" said Chicot, but in a tone not above a whisper.

However, Chicot's caution was unnecessary: he might have answered in his loudest tones, and his voice would not have been heard amid the applause and the bravos that shook the vaults of the chapel.

The three Lorraine princes, who had given the signal for the

acclamations, waited until they ceased ; then the cardinal, who was nearest the duke, advanced a step toward him and said :

“ You have come amongst us of your own free will, prince ? ”

“ Of my own free will, monsieur.”

“ Who instructed you in the holy mystery ? ”

“ My friend the Comte de Monsoreau, a man zealous for religion.”

“ And now,” said the Duc de Guise in his turn, “ now that your Highness is one of us, deign, monseigneur, to tell us what you intend doing for the good of the holy League.”

“ I intend to serve the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman religion in everything in which she needs my services,” was the neophyte’s answer.

“ *Ventre de biche !* ” thought Chicot, “ these, upon my soul, are very asinine folk to think they must say things like that in the dark ! Why don’t they lay their proposals before King Henri III., my illustrious master ? Why, all this would suit him to a shade. Processions, flagellations, extirpations of heresy, as in Rome, fagots and *autos-da-fè*, as in Flanders and Spain, — why, he looks on them all as the only means of giving him children, does our good prince. *Corbœuf !* I should n’t mind getting out of my confessional and making a speech myself, so deeply have I been touched by that dear Duc d’Anjou’s twaddle. Continue, worthy brother of his Majesty : noble fool, go on ! ”

And the Duc d’Anjou, as if inspired by the jester’s encouragement, went on :

“ But,” said he, “ the interests of religion should not be the sole aim which you gentlemen propose to attain. As for me, I see another.”

“ Egad ! ” muttered Chicot, “ I am a gentlemen too ; this ought to have as much interest for me as for the others ; go on, Anjou, go on.”

“ Monseigneur,” said the cardinal, “ we are listening to your Highness with the most serious attention.”

“ And our hearts beat hopefully in listening to you,” said M. de Mayenne.

“ Then I will explain,” said the Duc d’Anjou, at the same time trying to pierce the dark recesses of the chapel with his uneasy glances, as if to be certain his words would fall only on ears worthy such confidence.

M. de Monsoreau knew the cause of the prince’s anxiety,

and reassured him by a significant look, accompanied by a significant smile.

"Now, when a gentleman thinks of what he owes to God," continued the duke, involuntarily lowering his voice, "he thinks, at the same time, of his" —

"*Parbleu !*" breathed Chicot, "of his king, that's well known."

"Of his country," said the Duc d'Anjou, "and he asks himself does his country really enjoy all the honor and all the prosperity that should fall to her lot; for every honorable gentleman is indebted for the advantages he possesses to God, in the first place, but, in the second, to the country whose child he is."

The assembly broke out into violent applause.

"Ah ! but then, what about the King ?" whispered Chicot. "So this poor monarch of ours is no longer worth talking about ? And I who used to believe, as it is written on the pyramid of Juvisy, that the king and the ladies come next after God !"

"I ask myself, then," pursued the Duc d'Anjou, whose prominent cheek-bones gradually took on a tinge of red, owing to his feverish excitement, "I ask myself whether my country enjoys the peace and happiness that the sweet and lovely land which answers to the name of France deserves, and to my grief I see that she is far indeed from enjoying them."

"In fact, my brothers, the state is torn asunder by different wills and tastes, one as powerful as another, and this is owing to the feebleness of that superior will which forgets that it is its duty to govern for the welfare of its subjects, or never remembers that royal duty except capriciously and at long intervals, and then at the wrong time, so that even its acts of energy only work evil; it is no doubt either to the fatal destiny of France or to the blindness of her chief that we must attribute her misfortunes. But whether we are ignorant of their true source or only suspect it, her misfortunes are not the less real. As for myself, I make the false friends of the King rather than the King himself responsible for the crimes and iniquities committed against religion. In any case, gentlemen, I feel bound, as a servant of the altar and the throne, to unite with those who seek by all means the extinction of heresy and the downfall of perfidious counsellors."

"And now, gentlemen, you know what I intended to do for the League when I became your associate."

"Oh!" murmured Chicot, struck all of a heap with wonder, "I think I can detect the earmarks of the conspiracy, and they are not the ears of an ass, either, as I had at first supposed, they are a fox's."

The speech of the Duc d'Anjou, which may have appeared a little long to our readers, separated as they are by three centuries from the politics of that period, had such deep interest for his hearers that most of them had come close up to the prince, so as not to lose a syllable of a discourse uttered in a voice that grew more and more faint according as the meaning grew more and more clear.

The scene was then a curious one. The twenty-five or thirty persons present, after they had thrown back their cowls, displayed, under the dim light of the solitary lamp, faces that were noble, keen, daring, and alive with curiosity.

Masses of shadow filled all the other parts of the building, which seemed to stand apart from the drama that was being acted at one single point.

The pale face of the Duc d'Anjou was a striking feature in the midst of this assembly, with his deep sunken eyes and a mouth that, when it opened, seemed distorted by the sinister grin of a death's head.

"Monseigneur," said the Duc de Guise, "while thanking you for the words you have just spoken, I think it right to inform you that you are surrounded by men not only devoted to the principles you profess, but to the person of your Royal Highness as well, and, if you doubted the truth of my statement, the close of the session would bring it home to you with irresistible force."

The Duc d'Anjou bowed and, as he raised his head, threw an anxious glance over the assembly.

"If I am not greatly mistaken," murmured Chicot, "all we have seen so far is but a preliminary, and something is going to take place of more importance than the humbug and twaddle we have seen and heard so far."

"Monseigneur," said the cardinal, who had noticed the prince's uneasy look, "if your Highness felt any alarm, the mere names of those around you would suffice to reassure you. They are the Governor of Aunis, M. d'Antraquet, Junior, M. de Ribeirac, and M. de Livarot, gentlemen, perhaps, known to

your Highness, and who are as brave as they are loyal. Then we have the Vidame de Castillon, the Baron de Lusignan, M. Cruce, and M. Leclerc, all equally admirers of the wisdom of your Royal Highness and all ready to march under your guidance for the emancipation of religion and the throne. We shall receive with gratitude the orders your Royal Highness will deign to give us."

The Duc d'Anjou could not repress a movement of pride. These Guises, whose haughty heads could never be forced to bend, now spoke of obeying.

The Duc de Mayenne spoke next.

"You are, by your birth," said he, "and because of your sagacity, monseigneur, the natural chief of the holy Union, and it is from you we must learn what ought to be our course with regard to those false friends of the King about whom we lately spoke."

"Nothing more simple," answered the prince, with that feverish excitement which in feeble natures supplies the place of courage; "when parasitic and poisonous plants grow in a field which, but for them, would produce a rich harvest, these dangerous weeds must be torn from the soil. The King is surrounded, not by friends, but by courtiers who are ruining him and who arouse continual scandal in France and throughout Christendom."

"It is true," said the Duc de Guise, in a gloomy voice.

"And moreover," rejoined the cardinal, "these courtiers prevent us, the true friends of his Majesty, from approaching him, as our birth and the offices we hold give us the right of doing."

"Oh," said the Duc de Mayenne, bluntly, "let us leave to common Leaguers, such as those present at our first meeting, the task of serving God. By serving God they will serve those who speak to them of God. But let us attend to our own business. Certain men are in our way; they defy and insult us, and are constantly showing their contempt for the prince whom we especially honor, and who is our leader."

At this the Duc d'Anjou's face flushed.

"Let us destroy," continued Mayenne, "let us destroy, to the very last among them, this infernal brood of rascals whom the King enriches with the fragments of our fortunes, and let each of us undertake to cut off one of them from the land of the living. We are thirty here; let us count."

"Your proposal is a wise one," said the Duc d'Anjou, "and your part of the work has already been accomplished, M. de Mayenne."

"What is done does not count," said Mayenne.

"We must have some part in the business, however, mon-seigneur," said D'Entragues. "I take Quélus for my share."

"And I Maugiron," said Livarot.

"And I Schomberg," said Ribeirac.

"Nothing could be better!" assented the Duc d'Anjou, "and we still have Bussy, my brave Bussy: he's pretty sure to give a good account of some of them."

"And we, too; we, too!" cried the rest of the Leaguers.

M. de Monsoreau advanced.

"Aha," muttered Chicot, who, seeing the turn things were taking, no longer felt any inclination to laugh; "so the grand huntsman is going to claim his share in the quarry also!"

Chicot was mistaken.

"Gentlemen," said Monsoreau, stretching out his hand, "I ask you to be silent for a moment. We are determined men, and yet we are afraid to open our hearts to one another. We are intelligent men, and yet we balk at childish scruples.

"Come, now, gentlemen, let us have a little courage, a little boldness, a little frankness. The question before us is not the conduct of the King's minions, the question before us is not the difficulty of approaching his royal person."

"Ah! we're coming to it," thought Chicot, straining his eyes and turning his hands into an ear-trumpet, so as not to lose a word of the harangue. "Well, go on, Monsoreau: make haste, I'm waiting."

"What we really complain of," resumed the count, "is that we are placed in an impossible situation. The kind of royalty under which we live is not acceptable to the French nobility: litanies, despotism, impotence, orgies, a prodigal expenditure on amusements that make us the laughing-stock of Europe, and, with that, the utmost penuriousness in all that concerns the arts or war. The conduct to which I refer is not simply the result of ignorance or weakness, gentlemen, it is the result of insanity."

The grand huntsman's words were received with deathlike silence. The impression made was the deeper because every one had often said in a whisper what he heard now spoken aloud, and was startled, as if by the echo of his own voice, and

shuddered at the thought that he was on all points in unison with the speaker.

M. de Monsoreau, who knew well that this silence was a mark of unanimous approval, continued :

“ Must we live under an idle, slothful, foolish king at the very moment when Spain is lighting her stakes, at the very moment when the old heresiarchs of Germany are waking from their slumbers in the shadow of her cloisters, at the very moment when England, acting according to her inflexible political system, is cutting off heads and ideas at the same time ? Every nation is working gloriously for the attainment of some object. We, we, I say, are asleep. Gentlemen, pardon me for saying before a great prince, who will, perhaps, blame my temerity, being naturally prejudiced by family feeling, that for four years we have been governed, not by a king, but by a monk.”

At these words, the explosion, so skilfully prepared and so skilfully held in check by the leaders during the last hour, burst with such violence that no one would have now recognized in those fanatic enthusiasts the cool and wily politicians of the former scene.

“ Down with Valois ! ” they shouted. “ Down with Brother Henri ! Give us a prince who is a gentleman ; a king who is a knight ; a tyrant, if it must be, but not a shaveling ! ”

“ Gentlemen, gentlemen,” said the Duc d’Anjou, hypocritically, “ let me plead for my brother, who deceives himself, or rather, who is deceived. Let me hope, gentlemen, that our judicious remonstrances, that the efficacious intervention of the power of the League, will lead him back into the right path.”

“ Hiss, serpent, hiss,” muttered Chicot.

“ Monseigneur,” answered the Duc de Guise, “ your Highness has heard, perhaps a little too soon, but, at all events, you *have* heard, the sincere expression of the meaning of our association. No, the object of this meeting is not a league against the Béarnais, who is a mere bugbear to frighten fools with, nor is it to take care of the Church, which is perfectly able to take care of herself : our object is the rescue of the French nobility from their present abject position. Too long have we been held back by the respect with which your Highness inspires us : too long has our knowledge of the love you feel for your family compelled us to dissemble our intentions. But all is now revealed, and your Highness is about to witness a

genuine session of the League, to which the former one was but introductory."

"What do you mean, M. le Duc?" asked the prince, his heart beating at once with alarm and ambition.

"Monseigneur," continued the Duc de Guise, "we have met, not, — as M. de Monsoreau has judiciously remarked, — not for the purpose of discussing worn-out theories, but for effective action. To-day we have chosen as our chief a prince capable of honoring and enriching the nobility of France; and, as it was the custom of the ancient Franks, when they elected a leader, to offer that leader a present worthy of him, so we, too, offer a present to our chosen leader."

Every heart beat, but none so furiously as that of the Duc d'Anjou.

However, he remained mute and impassive; his paleness alone betrayed his emotion.

"Gentlemen," the speaker went on, taking from the bench behind him a rather heavy object and raising it in both his hands, "gentlemen, this is the present which, in your name, I lay at the prince's feet."

"A crown!" cried the duke, scarcely able to stand, "a crown for me, gentlemen!"

"Long live François III.!" shouted all the gentlemen, in tones that shook the building, and, at the same time, drawing their swords.

"For me! for me!" stammered the prince, quaking with joy and terror, — "for me! Oh, it is impossible! My brother lives; my brother is the Lord's anointed."

"We depose him," said the duke, "waiting until God sanctions the election we have made by his death, or, rather, waiting until some of his subjects, weary of this inglorious reign, anticipate by poison or dagger the justice of God!"

"Gentlemen!" said the prince, feebly, "gentlemen" —

"Monseigneur," interrupted the cardinal, "to the noble scruple your Highness has just now expressed, this is our answer: Henri III. was the Lord's anointed, but we have deposed him: he is no longer the elect of God; it is you who are going to be so. We have here a temple as venerable as that of Rheims, for within it repose the relics of Sainte Geneviève, the patron saint of Paris; within it is interred the body of Clovis, our first Christian king. Well, then, monseigneur, in this holy temple, before the statue of

the real founder of the French monarchy, I, a prince of the Church, who may not unreasonably hope one day to become her head, say to you, monseigneur, that I have here a holy oil sent by Pope Gregory XIII. to take the place of the holy chrism. Monseigneur, name your future archbishop of Rheims, name your constable, and in a moment you will be our anointed king, and your brother Henri, unless he surrender the throne to you, will be the usurper. Child, light the altar."

Immediately the chorister, who was evidently expecting the order, issued from the sacristy with a lighter in his hand, and in a moment fifty lights blazed on the altar and in the choir.

Then were seen on the altar a mitre, gleaming with jewels, and a sword, adorned with flower-de-luces: the one was the archiepiscopal mitre; the other the constable's sword.

The same instant, through the darkness which the illumination of the choir had not entirely dispersed, the "*Veni Creator*" resounded from the organ.

This startling scenic display, so skilfully introduced by the three Lorraine princes, was a surprise to the Duc d'Anjou himself, and produced the deepest impression on the spectators. The bold grew bolder, and the weak felt themselves strengthened.

The Duc d'Anjou raised his head, and, with firmer step and steadier arm than could have been expected, marched up to the altar, took the mitre in his left hand and the sword in his right, returned to the cardinal and the duke, who knew already the honors in store for them, placed the mitre on the cardinal's head, and buckled the sword on the duke.

This decisive action, which was the less expected because the Duc d'Anjou's irresolute nature was a matter of notoriety, was hailed with thunders of applause.

"Gentlemen," said the duke to the others, "give your names to M. de Mayenne, grand master of France; the day I am king you shall all be Knights of the Order."

The applause was renewed, and all went after one another to give their names to the Duc de Mayenne.

"*Mordieu!*" thought Chicot, "what a chance to win the blue ribbon! I'll never see such another—and to think I must let it slip!"

"Now to the altar, sire," said the Cardinal de Guise.

"M. de Monsoreau, my captain-colonel, MM. de Ribeirac

and D'Entragues, my captains, M. de Livarot, my lieutenant of the guards, take the places in the choir to which the posts I confide to you give you a right."

Each of those named took the position which, at a real coronation, etiquette would have assigned him.

"Gentlemen," added the duke, addressing the rest of the assembly, "you may all ask me for a favor, and I will see to it that none of you depart dissatisfied."

During this time the cardinal was robing himself in his pontifical vestments behind the altar. He soon reappeared, carrying the holy ampulla, which he laid on the altar.

Then, at a sign from him, the little chorister brought a Bible and a cross. The cardinal took both, placed the cross on the Bible, and presented them to the Duc d'Anjou, who laid his hand on them.

"In presence of God," said the prince, "I promise my people to maintain and honor our holy religion, as it behooves the most Christian King and eldest son of the Church to do. And so may God and his Holy Gospel aid me!"

"Amen!" answered all the spectators in unison.

"Amen!" responded a kind of echo that seemed to come from the depths of the church.

The Duc de Guise, in performance of his function as constable, mounted the three steps of the altar and laid his sword in front of the tabernacle to be blessed by the cardinal.

The cardinal next drew it from the scabbard, and, seizing the blade, presented the hilt to the king, who clasped it.

"Sire," said he, "take this sword, which is given to you with the benediction of the Lord, so that with it and through the power of the Holy Ghost you may be able to resist all your enemies, and protect and defend Holy Church and the kingdom entrusted to you. Take this sword so that with its aid you may dispense justice, protect the widow and the orphan, and correct abuses, to the end that, covering yourself with glory by the practice of all the virtues, you may deserve to reign with Him whose image you are on earth, and who, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, reigneth for ever and ever."

The duke lowered the sword until the point touched the floor, and, after offering it to God, restored it to the Duc de Guise.

Then the chorister brought a cushion and placed it before the prince, who knelt upon it.

Next, the cardinal opened the little silver-gilt casket and extracted from it, with the point of a gold needle, a particle of holy oil, which he spread on the patine.

Then, holding the patine in his left hand, he said two prayers over the duke, and, smearing his finger with the oil, traced a cross on his head, saying :

"Vngo te in regem de oleo sanctificato, in nomine Patris, Filii, et Spiritus Sancti."

Almost immediately after, the chorister wiped off the oil with a gold-embroidered handkerchief.

Next, the cardinal took the crown in both his hands and held it immediately above the prince's head, without, however, touching it. The Duc de Guise and the Duc de Mayenne then approached and supported the crown on each side. The cardinal, thereupon, withdrew his right hand from the crown and with it blessed the prince, saying :

"May God crown you with the crown of glory and justice!"

Then taking the crown and placing it on the duke's head, he said :

"Receive this crown in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."

The Duc d'Anjou, pale and frightened, felt the pressure of the crown on his head and instinctively raised his hand to touch it.

Then the chorister rang a bell ; all the spectators bent their heads.

But they soon raised them again, brandishing their swords and crying :

"Long live François III.!"

"Sire," said the cardinal to the Duc d'Anjou, "from to-day you reign over France, for you have been crowned by Pope Gregory XIII. himself, and I am merely his representative."

"Ventre de biche!" muttered Chicot, "what a pity it is I have n't the king's evil!"

"Gentlemen," said the Duc d'Anjou, rising with an air of pride and majesty, "I shall never forget the names of the thirty gentlemen who were the first to deem me worthy of reigning over them: and now, gentlemen, farewell, and may God have you in his safe and holy keeping!"

The cardinal bent his head, as did also the Duc de Guise, but Chicot, who had a side view of them, perceived that while the Duc de Mayenne was escorting the new king from the

church, the other two Lorraine princes exchanged an ironical smile.

"Oho!" said the Gascon to himself, "what does that mean, I wonder, and what kind of a game is it at which every one cheats?"

Meanwhile the Duc d'Anjou descended the staircase to the crypt and was soon lost in the darkness of the subterranean church, whither all the other members of the association followed him, one after the other, except the three brothers, who entered the sacristy, and the brother porter, who remained to put out the lights on the altar.

The chorister shut the door of the crypt behind those who had passed in, and the church was lit only by that single lamp which, as it was never extinguished, seemed an unknown symbol to the vulgar, but told the elect of some mysterious initiation.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW CHICOT THOUGHT HE WAS LEARNING HISTORY, BUT WAS REALLY LEARNING GENEALOGY.

CHICOT got up in his confessional to straighten out his stiffened members. He had every reason to suppose this session was the last, and, as it was nearly two in the morning, he set about making himself comfortable for the rest of the night.

But, to his amazement, no sooner did the three Lorraine princes hear the grating of the key in the lock of the crypt than they came out of the sacristy: this time, however, they were unfrocked and in their usual dress.

Moreover, when the little chorister saw them, he burst out into such a frank and merry fit of laughter that Chicot could not, for the life of him, help laughing also, without exactly knowing why.

The Duc de Mayenne quickly approached the staircase.

"Do not laugh so boisterously, sister," said he, "they have barely left, and you might be heard."

"Sister!" repeated Chicot, marching from one surprise to another. "Can this little devil of a monk be a woman?"

And, in fact, when the cowl of the novice was flung back,

there appeared the brightest and most bewitching woman's face that ever Leonardo da Vinci transferred to canvas, although he has painted *La Gioconda*:—

Jet black eyes, sparkling with mischief, but which, when the pupils dilated, became still darker and assumed an expression that was almost terrible in its seriousness.

A little, rosy, delicately formed mouth, a nose that was faultless in shape and outline, and, finally, a beautifully rounded chin terminating the perfect oval of a countenance that was, perhaps, rather pale, but contrasted superbly with the ebony of the classical eyebrows.

Such is the portrait of the sister of the Guises, Madame de Montpensier, a dangerous siren who was accused of having one shoulder a little higher than the other and of an ungraceful malformation of the left leg that made her limp slightly; but these imperfections were hidden at present by her thick monkish robe.

It was, perhaps, because of these imperfections that the soul of a demon was lodged in a body which had the head of an angel.

Chicot recognized her, for he had seen her a score of times at the court of her cousin, Queen Louise de Vaudemont, and the mystery was deepened by her presence here, as it was by that of the three brothers who persisted so obstinately in remaining after every one else had gone.

"Ah, Brother Cardinal," exclaimed the duchess, in a paroxysm of laughter, "how well you acted the saint and how piously you spoke of God! You actually frightened me for a moment. I thought you were taking the thing seriously; and the fool who let himself be greased and crowned!—and what an object he was under that same crown!"

"That does n't matter," said the duke, "we have got what we wanted: François cannot eat his own words now. That Monsoreau, who no doubt has his own sinister motives for his action, has managed so well that we are at last pretty certain that our doughty leader cannot desert us half-way to the scaffold, as he did *La Mole* and *Coconnas*."

"Oh, as for that," answered Mayenne, "the way to the scaffold is a route there would be some difficulty in getting the princes of our house to take; the distance between the abbey of St. Geneviève and the Louvre will always be less than that between the Hôtel de Ville and the Place de Grène."

Chicot saw they were making sport of the Duc d'Anjou, and, as he hated the prince, he could have gladly embraced the Guises for hoodwinking him so artfully — all except Mayenne: he would give Mayenne's share in the embrace to Madame de Montpensier.

"And now to business, gentlemen," said the cardinal. "Are all the doors safely locked?"

"I am sure they are," answered the duchess: "but I will go and see."

"No, no," said the duke, "you must be tired, my dear little choir boy."

"Oh, not at all; the whole thing was too amusing."

"Mayenne, you said he was here, did you not?" asked the duke.

"Yes."

"I did not notice him."

"Naturally. He is hiding."

"Where?"

"In a confessional."

The words sounded in Chicot's ears like the thousand trumpets of the Apocalypse.

"Who is hiding in a confessional?" he muttered, quaking like an aspen. "*Ventre de biche*, there can be no one hiding but me!"

"Then he has seen and heard everything?" inquired the duke.

"Oh, that does n't matter; does n't he belong to us?"

"Bring him here, Mayenne," said the duke.

Mayenne went down one of the stairs of the choir, paused as if at a loss, and then made straight for the box that concealed the Gascon.

Chicot was brave, but this time his teeth fairly chattered with terror, and cold drops of sweat dropped from his forehead on his hand.

"Ah, now I'm in for it!" said he to himself, trying to free his sword from the folds of his robe, "but I won't die in this box, like a rat in a hole. I'll show a bold front to death, if I have to, *ventre de biche*! And now that I have the chance, I'll try to make short work of that fellow before I hop the twig myself."

And, with the purpose of executing this doughty project, Chicot, who had at length found the hilt of his sword, had his

hand already on the latch of the door, when the voice of the duchess came to his ears.

"Not that one, Mayenne," said she, "not that one; the other to the left, yonder at the back."

"Ah, I see," answered the duke, whose hand almost touched Chicot's confessional, but who, on hearing his sister's direction, turned quickly to the confessional opposite.

"Ugh!" said the Gascon, with a sigh that Gorenflot might have envied, "it was a narrow escape; but who the devil is in the other one?"

"Come out, Maître Nicolas David," said Mayenne, "we are alone."

"Here I am, monseigneur," said a man who stepped from the confessional.

"Good!" murmured the Gascon, "the party was not complete without you, Maître Nicolas. I sought thee long, and now that I have found thee, lo! meseemeth I care not for thy company, Maître Nicolas!"

"You have seen and heard everything, have you not?" asked the Duc de Guise.

"I have not lost a word of what occurred, and you may rest assured, monseigneur, I shall not forget a single detail."

"Then you will be able to relate everything to the envoy of his Holiness Gregory XIII.?" inquired the Balafre.

"Without omitting a particle."

"By the way, my brother Mayenne tells me you have done wonders for us. Would you mind saying what you have done?"

The cardinal and the duchess, moved by curiosity, drew near, so that the three princes and their sister formed one group.

Nicolas David was three feet from them, in the full light of the lamp.

"I have done what I promised, monseigneur," answered Nicolas David, "and that means I have found a way of proving your undoubted right to sit on the throne of France."

"They, too!" thought Chicot; "why, it looks as if every one was going to be king of France! Well, let the best man win."

It will be seen that our brave Chicot was recovering his gaiety. This was due to the following circumstances:

In the first place, he had a fair prospect of escaping from an

imminent peril in a very unexpected fashion ; secondly, he was on the point of discovering a nice conspiracy ; and lastly, said conspiracy would supply him with the means of destroying his two great enemies, Mayenne and David.

"Dear Gorenflot," he murmured, when all these ideas had found a lodging in his brain, "what a stunning supper I'll give you to-morrow for the loan of your frock ! You wait and see."

"But if the usurpation is too evident, we must give it up," said Henri de Guise. "I cannot have all the kings in Christendom who reign by right divine snarling at my heels."

"I have anticipated this scruple, monseigneur," said the lawyer, bowing to the duke and meeting the eyes of the triumvirate confidently. "I am something more than a skilful fencer, although my enemies, to deprive me of your favor, may have reported to the contrary. . . Being versed in theological and legal studies, I have naturally, as a good casuist and legist is bound to do, examined the annals and decrees which support my statements as to the customs regulating the succession to the throne. Legitimacy is the main factor in this succession, and I have discovered that you are the legitimate heirs, and the Valois but a parasitic and usurping branch."

The assurance with which Nicolas David uttered this exordium elated Madame de Montpensier, quickened the curiosity of the cardinal and Mayenne, and almost smoothed away the wrinkles on the austere brow of the Duc de Guise.

"Still, it is difficult to believe," said he, "that the house of Lorraine, illustrious as it most assuredly is, can claim precedence over that of Valois."

"And yet it is proved, monseigneur," said Maître Nicolas, lifting his frock and drawing a parchment from his voluminous breeches, not without disclosing by this movement the hilt of a long rapier.

The duke took the parchment from the hands of Nicolas David.

"What is this ?" asked he.

"The genealogical tree of the house of Lorraine."

"The trunk of which is ?"

"Charlemagne, monseigneur."

"Charlemagne ?" cried the three brothers, with an air of incredulity, which was, nevertheless, not unmixed with satisfaction.

"It is impossible," said the Duc de Guise. "The first Duc de Lorraine was a contemporary of Charlemagne, but his name was Ranier, and he was in no way related to that great emperor."

"Stay a moment, monseigneur," said Nicolas. "You must surely understand that I have not been dealing with one of those questions which are answered by a simple contradiction, and which any court of heraldry would set at nought. What you need is a protracted lawsuit which will occupy the attention of the Parliament and of the people, and which will give you time to influence, not the people, — they are yours already, — but the Parliament. And now, monseigneur, this is your true pedigree :

"Ranier, first Duc de Lorraine, contemporary of Charlemagne ;

"Guibert, his son, contemporary of Louis le Débonnaire :

"Henri, son of Guibert, contemporary of Charles the Bald" —

"But," said the Duke de Guise.

"A little patience, monseigneur. We are getting on ; pray, pay close attention — Bonne."

"Yes," interrupted the Duke, "daughter of Ricin, second son of Ranier."

"Well," returned the lawyer, "whom did she marry ?"

"Bonne ?"

"Yes."

"Charles de Lorraine, son of Louis IV., King of France."

"Charles de Lorraine, son of Louis IV., King of France," repeated David. "Now add : brother of Lothaire, and deprived of the crown of France by Hugues Capet, who usurped it after the death of Louis V."

"Oh, oh !" exclaimed the Duc de Mayenne and the cardinal.

"Go on," said the Balafre, "I am beginning to get a glimpse of your meaning."

"Now, Charles de Lorraine was the heir of his brother when the race of the latter became extinct. Now, the race of Lothaire is extinct ; consequently, gentlemen, you are the true and sole heirs of the crown of France."

"*Mordieu !*" thought Chicot ; "he 's even a more venomous beast than I had supposed."

"What do you say to this, brother ?" asked the Duc de Mayenne and the cardinal in unison.

"I say," answered the Balafré, "that there exists, unfortunately, a law in France which is called the Salic law, and which utterly destroys our claims."

"Just what I expected you to say, monseigneur," cried David, with the pride born of self-esteem: "what is the first example of the Salic law?"

"The accession of Philippe de Valois to the prejudice of Edward of England."

"What is the date of that accession?"

The Balafré tried to recollect.

"1328," said the cardinal, without hesitation.

"That is to say, three hundred and forty-one years after the usurpation of Hugues Capet, two hundred and forty years after the extinction of the race of Lothaire. Then, for two hundred and forty years before the Salic law was invented, your ancestors had a right to the throne. Now, every one knows that no law has a retroactive effect."

"You are an able man, Maître Nicolas David," said the Balafré, regarding him with a mixture of admiration and contempt.

"It is exceedingly ingenious," added the cardinal.

"And exceedingly fine," said Mayenne.

"It is admirable," continued the duchess; "so I am princess royal; I will have no one less than the Emperor of Germany for a husband now."

"O Lord God!" murmured Chicot, "thou knowest I have never offered thee but one prayer: '*Ne nos inducas in tentationem, et libera nos ab advocatis.*'"

The Duc de Guise alone remained grave and thoughtful amid the general enthusiasm.

"And to say that such subterfuges are needed in the case of a man of my height," he murmured. "To think that the people will base their obedience on parchments like that, instead of reading a man's title to nobility in the flash of his eyes or of his sword!"

"You are right, Henri," said the cardinal, "right a thousand times. And if men were content to judge by the face, you would be a king among kings, since other princes appear common by your side. But, to mount the throne, a protracted lawsuit is, as Maître Nicolas David has said, absolutely essential; and when you are seated on it, it will be important, as you have admitted yourself, that the escutcheon of our house

should not seem inferior to the escutcheons suspended above the other royal thrones of Europe."

"Then I presume this genealogy is a good one," said Henri de Guise, with a sigh, "and here are the two hundred gold crowns promised you in my name by my brother Mayenne, Maître Nicolas David."

"And here are another two hundred," said the cardinal to the lawyer, whose eyes sparkled with delight as he stuffed them into his capacious breeches; "they are for the new mission which we are going to give you."

"Speak, monseigneur, I am entirely at the orders of your Eminence."

"We cannot empower you to bear yourself to the Holy Father Gregory XIII. this genealogy, which requires his approval. Your rank would hardly entitle you to admission to the Vatican."

"Alas! yes," said Nicolas David, "I have high aspirations, but I am of humble birth. Ah! if only I had been born a simple private gentleman!"

"Can't you keep your mouth shut, you vagabond!" said Chicot.

"But you are not," continued the cardinal, "and it is unfortunate. We are therefore compelled to entrust Pierre de Gondy with this mission."

"Excuse me, brother," said the duchess, now quite serious; "the Gondys are, of course, exceedingly clever, but they are people over whom we have no hold. Their ambition is their only guarantee, and they may conclude that their ambition will receive as much satisfaction from King Henri as from the House of Guise."

"My sister is right, Louis," said the Duc de Mayenne, with his customary roughness, "and we cannot trust Pierre de Gondy as we trust Nicolas David, who is our man and whom we can have hanged whenever we choose."

This brutal hint, aimed point-blank at the face of the lawyer, had the most unfortunate effect on Maître David. He broke into a convulsive fit of laughter that betrayed the most excessive terror.

"Our brother Charles is jesting," said Henri de Guise to the trembling jurist. "We all recognize you as our trusty follower; you have proved that you are so in many cases."

"And notably in mine," thought Chicot, shaking his fist at his enemy, or rather, at his two enemies.

"You need not be alarmed, Charles," said the cardinal, "nor need you be, either, Catharine; all my measures have been taken in advance. Pierre de Gondy will carry this genealogy to Rome, but mixed with other papers, without knowing what he is carrying. The Pope will approve or disapprove, without Gondy knowing anything of his approval or disapproval, and, finally, Gondy will return to France, still ignorant of what he carries, bringing us back the genealogy, whether it be approved or disapproved. You, Nicolas David, must start at the same hour he does, and you must wait for him at Chalons or Lyons or Avignon, according as the despatches you will receive from us direct you to stop in one of these three cities. Thus, the true secret of the enterprise will be in your possession and in yours only. You see clearly, then, that we regard you as our confidential agent."

David bowed.

"Thou knowest on what condition, dear friend," murmured Chicot: "to be hanged if thou committest a blunder; but rest easy, I swear by Sainte Geneviève, here present in plaster or marble or wood, or perhaps even in bone, that thou'rt stationed at this moment between two gibbets, but the one nearest thee, dear friend, is the one I am building."

The three brothers shook hands and kissed their sister the duchess, who had come to them with the three robes left behind in the sacristy. Then, after aiding them to don these garments of safety, she drew down her cowl over her eyes, and preceded them to the porch, where the brother porter awaited them. Then all four disappeared, followed by Nicolas David, whose gold crowns clinked at every step.

The brother porter barred the door behind them, then returned to the church and extinguished the lamp in the choir. Immediately the chapel was enshrouded in thickest darkness, and Chicot felt a revival of that mysterious horror which had already more than once raised every single hair on his skull.

After this, the sound of the monk's sandals on the pavement became fainter and still fainter until it died away in the distance.

Then five minutes passed, and a very long five minutes they seemed to Chicot, without anything occurring to trouble the silence and the darkness.

"Good," said the Gascon, "this time everything is apparently finished. The three acts are played and the actors have departed. I must try to follow their example: I have had enough of that sort of comedy for a single night."

And Chicot, who, since he had seen tombs moving and confessionals with tenants in them, was no longer inclined to stay in the church till daybreak, softly raised the latch, pushed the door open cautiously, and stepped out of his box.

While observing the goings and comings of the chorister, Chicot had noticed in a corner a ladder intended for use in cleaning the stained-glass windows. He lost no time. Groping with his hands, and stepping carefully, he reached the corner without making any noise, laid his hand on the ladder, and, finding his way as best he could, placed the ladder at a window.

By the light of the moon, Chicot saw that he had not been deceived in his anticipations: the window opened on the graveyard of the convent, and the graveyard was divided from the Rue Bordelle.

Chicot opened the window, threw a leg over the sill, and, drawing the ladder to him with that energy and dexterity which fear or joy always gives, he passed it from the inside to the outside.

As soon as he was on the ground, he hid the ladder in a clump of yew-trees at the foot of the wall, stole from tomb to tomb to the last fence between him and the street, and clambered over this obstacle, not without bringing some stones down along with him into the street on the other side.

Once there, he breathed long and heavily.

He had escaped with a few scratches from a wasp's nest where he had felt more than once that his life was at stake.

Then, when the air moved freely through his lungs, he made his way to the Rue Saint-Jacques, not stopping until he reached the *Corne d'Abondance*, and knocked at the door without hesitation or delay.

Maître Claude Bonhommet opened the door in person.

He was a man who knew that any inconvenience he suffered was generally made up to him, and who depended for the building up of his fortune more on his extras than on his ordinary custom.

He recognized Chicot at the first glance, although Chicot had left the inn as a cavalier and returned to it as a monk.

"So it's you, my gentleman," said he; "you are welcome."

Chicot handed him a crown.

"And Brother Gorenflot?" he asked.

The face of the innkeeper expanded in a broad smile.

He advanced to the private room and pushed open the door.

"Look," said he.

Brother Gorenflot was snoring in exactly the same spot where Chicot had left him.

"*Ventre de biche!* my venerated friend," said the Gascon. "you have had a terrible nightmare, and never suspected it!"

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW MONSIEUR AND MADAME DE SAINT-LUC TRAVELLED AND MET WITH A TRAVELLING COMPANION.

NEXT morning, about the hour when Brother Gorenflot, comfortably huddled up in his robe, was beginning to wake, our reader, if he had travelled on the highway from Paris to Angers, might have seen, somewhere between Chartres and Nogent, two horsemen, a gentleman and his page, whose peaceful nags were ambling side by side, rubbing each other's noses, communicating their mutual sentiments by neighing or breathing, like honest animals, which, though deprived of the gift of speech, had, and not the less on that account, discovered a way to give expression to their thoughts.

The two horsemen had reached Chartres the evening before, almost at the same hour, on smoking and frothing coursers; one of the two coursers had even fallen on the cathedral square, and as this happened just at the time when the faithful were going to mass, the citizens of Chartres were moved at the spectacle of the death of this noble steed, for which its owners seemed to feel no more concern than if it had been some spavined jade.

Some had noticed --- the citizens of Chartres have been celebrated in all ages as wide-awake observers --- some, we repeat, had even noticed that the taller of the two horsemen had slipped a crown into the hand of an honest lad, who thereupon guided the pair to a neighboring inn, and that, half an hour later, they had issued forth through the back gate opening on the plain, mounted on fresh steeds, and with a high color

on their cheeks that bore testimony to the excellence of the glasses of hot wine they had just imbibed.

Once in the country — bare and naked enough, but tinged with those bluish tones that are the harbingers of spring — the taller of the two cavaliers drew near the smaller, and opening his arms, said :

“ My own dear little wife, you may kiss me at your ease, for now we have nothing more to fear.”

Then Madame de Saint-Luc, for it was she beyond a doubt, leaned gracefully forward, opened the mantle in which she was muffled, rested her arms on the young man's shoulders, and, with her eyes plunged into the depths of his, gave him the lingering, tender kiss he had asked.

As a result of the confidence expressed by Saint-Luc to his wife, and perhaps also as a result of the kiss given by Madame de Saint-Luc to her husband, they stopped that day at a little hostelry in the village of Courville, only four miles from Chartres. This hostelry, by its isolation, its doors front and rear, and by a thousand other advantages, assured to the two lovers perfect security.

There they remained a whole day and a whole night, mysteriously concealed in their little chamber, where they shut themselves up after breakfast, requesting the host not to disturb them before dawn next day, as they were very tired after their long journey, and this request was obeyed to the letter.

It was on the forenoon of that day that we discover Monsieur and Madame de Saint-Luc on the highway between Paris and Nogent.

As they were feeling more tranquil on that day than on the evening before, they were no longer travelling as fugitives, nor even as lovers, but as schoolboys who turn out of their way every moment to plunder the early buds, collect the early mosses, or gather the early flowers, — those sentinels of spring that pierce the crests of winter's fleeing snows, — and take infinite delight in the play of the sunlight on the sparkling plumage of the ducks, or in the flitting of a hare across the plain.

“ *Morbleu !* ” cried Saint-Luc, suddenly, “ what a glorious thing it is to be free ! Have you ever been free, Jeanne ? ”

“ I ? ” answered the young wife, in tones of exuberant joy, “ never ; this is the very first time in my life I have had my fill of air and space. My father was suspicious ; my mother

home-keeping. I never went out except attended by a governess, two maids, and a big lackey. I never remember running on the grass, since the time when a wild, laughing child, I used to scamper through the great woods of Méridor with my good Diane, challenging her to a race and scudding through the branches until we lost sight of each other. Then we would stop, panting, at the noise of a stag, or doe, or red deer, which, in its alarm at our approach, rushed from its haunt, and then we would be alone, thrilled by the silence of the vast forest. But, at least, you were free, my love."

"I free?"

"Of course, a man" —

"Well, then, I have never been free. Reared with the Due d'Anjou; brought by him to Poland, and brought back by him again to Paris; condemned to be always at his side by the perpetual laws of etiquette; followed, whenever I tried to get away, by that doleful voice of his, crying:

"'Saint-Luc, my friend, I am bored; come here and we'll be bored in company.'

"Free! ah, yes, indeed! with that corset that strangled my stomach, and that monstrous starched ruff that rubbed the skin off my neck, and that dirty gum with which I had to curl my hair, and that little cap fastened on my head by pins. Oh, no, no, my dear Jeanne, I don't think I was as free as you were. So you see I am making the most of my liberty. Great heavens! is there anything in the world to be compared to freedom? and what fools are they who give it up when they might have kept it?"

"But what if we were caught, Saint-Luc?" said the young woman, with an anxious glance behind her; "what if we were put in the Bastille?"

"If we are there together, my own, it will be but half a misfortune. If I recollect aright, we were as much confined yesterday as if we had been state prisoners, and we did not find it particularly irksome."

"Saint-Luc," said Jeanne, smiling archly, "don't indulge in useless hopes; if we are taken, you may be quite sure we shall not be locked up together."

And the charming young woman blushed at the thought that, while saying so little, she would have liked to say so much.

"Then, if that be the case, we must conceal ourselves well," said Saint-Luc.

"Oh, you need not be alarmed," answered Jeanne, "we have nothing to fear, we shall be concealed perfectly. If you knew Méridor and its tall oaks, that seem like pillars of a temple whose dome is the sky, and its endless thickets and its sleepy rivers, that in summer glide under dusky arches of verdure, and in winter creep under layers of dead foliage, its wide lawns, its immense ponds, its fields of corn, its acres of flowers, and the little turrets from which thousands of doves are continually escaping, flitting and buzzing like bees around a hive — And that is not all, Saint-Luc: in the midst of this little kingdom, its queen, the enchantress of these gardens of Armida, the lovely, the good, the peerless Diane, a heart of diamond set in gold, — you will love her, Saint-Luc."

"I love her already, since she has loved you."

"Oh, I am very sure she loves me still and will love me always. Diane is not the woman to change capriciously in her friendships. But you can have no idea of the happy life we shall lead in this nest of moss and flowers, now about to feel the verdant touch of spring! Diane is the real ruler of the household, so we need not be afraid of disturbing the baron. He is a warrior of the time of François I., now as feeble and inoffensive as he was once strong and daring; he thinks only of the past, Marignano's victor and Pavia's vanquished; his present tenderness and his future hopes are concentrated on his beloved Diane. We can live in Méridor, and he not know or even perceive it. And if he know? Oh, we can get out of the difficulty by listening attentively while he assures us that Diane is the most beautiful girl in the world and François I. the greatest captain of all ages."

"It will be delightful," said Saint-Luc, "but I foresee some terrible quarrels."

"Between whom?"

"The baron and me."

"About what? François I.?"

"No, I'll give way to him on that point; but about the most beautiful woman in the world."

"Oh, I do not count; you see I'm your wife."

"Ah, you're right there," said Saint-Luc.

"Just fancy what our existence will be, my love," continued Jeanne. "In the morning we're off for the woods through the little gate of the pavilion which Diane will make over to us for our abode. I know that pavilion; a dainty little house

built under Louis XII., with a turret at either end. Fond as you are of flowers and lace, you will be charmed with its delicate architecture; and then such a number of windows, windows from which you have a view of the quiet, sombre woods, as far as the eye can reach, and of the deer feeding in the avenues, raising their startled heads at every whisper of the forest; from the windows opposite you have a vision of plains golden with corn, white-walled cottages with their red-tiled roofs, the Loire glistening in the sun and populous with little boats; then, nine miles away, a bark among the reeds for ourselves; then, our own horses and dogs, with which we'll course the stag through the great woods, while the old baron, unaware of the presence of his guests, will say, as he hears the baying in the distance: 'Listen, Diane; would you not fancy Astrea and Phlegethon were hunting?'

"And Diane would answer: 'And if they are hunting, dear father, let them hunt.'"

"Let us push on, Jeanne," said Saint-Luc, "you make me long to be at Méridor."

And they clapped spurs to their horses, which, for two or three leagues, galloped like lightning, then halted to allow their riders to resume an interrupted conversation or improve an awkwardly given kiss.

In this fashion they journeyed from Chartres to Mans, where they spent a whole day, feeling now almost secure; it was another delightful halt in their delightful rambles; but next morning they made a firm resolution to reach Méridor that very evening, and to make their way through the sandy forests which, at that period, stretched from Guècelard to Écomoy.

When Saint-Luc came to them, he regarded his perils as things of the past—he was well acquainted with the King's fiery yet sluggish temper. According to the state of his mind after Saint-Luc's flight, he would have sent twenty couriers and a hundred guards after them with orders to take them dead or alive, or else he would have sighed heavily, raised his arms above the bed-clothes, and murmured:

"Ah! traitor Saint-Luc! why have I not known thee sooner?"

Now, as the fugitives had not seen any courier at their heels and had not encountered any guards, the probability was that the slothful temper of King Henri had got the better of his fiery temper, and so he was letting them alone.

Such were the thoughts of Saint-Luc as he glanced behind him occasionally, without catching sight of a single pursuer on his solitary path.

"Good," said Saint-Luc to himself, "poor Chicot must have had to face the brunt of the storm; fool though he be, and, perhaps, because he is a fool, he gave me good advice. He'll get out of the trouble with an anagram on me more or less witty."

And Saint-Luc recalled a terrible anagram Chicot had made on him in the heyday of his favor.

Suddenly Saint-Luc felt the pressure of his wife's hand on his arm.

He started. It was not a caress.

"Look," said Jeanne.

Saint-Luc turned round and saw on the horizon a horseman riding at a rapid pace along the road they were following.

This cavalier was on the most elevated part of the highway, and his form, as it stood out from the dull, gray sky, seemed far larger than life, an effect of perspective our reader must have sometimes noticed in similar circumstances.

In the eyes of Saint-Luc the incident was of sinister augury: it came to cloud his hopes at the moment they were brightest, and, although he tried to put on an air of calmness, he knew the capricious nature of Henri III. too well not to be alarmed.

"Yes," said he, turning pale in spite of himself, "there is a horseman yonder."

"Let us fly," said Jeanne, spurring her horse.

"No," said Saint-Luc, who did not allow his fear to get entire control of him, "no, as far as I can judge, there is but a single horseman, and I must not run away from one man. Let us draw aside and let him pass; when he passes, we can continue our journey."

"But if he stops?"

"Oh, if he stops, we'll know with whom we have to deal, and act accordingly."

"You are right," said Jeanne, "and I was wrong to be afraid, since my Saint-Luc is here to protect me."

"For all that, we had better fly," said Saint-Luc, who, on looking back again, perceived that the stranger saw them and had set his horse to a gallop; "for there is a plume in your hat and under the hat a ruff that make me uneasy."

"Goodness gracious! how can a plume and a ruff make you

uneasy?" asked Jeanne of her husband, who had seized her bridle rein and was hurrying her horse into the wood.

"Because the color of the feathers is at present very fashionable at court and the ruff is a new invention. Now, the dyeing of such plumes comes too high and the starching of such ruffs requires too much care to suit the pockets or the tastes of gentlemen belonging to the country whose fat pullets Chicot is so great an admirer of. Whip and spur, Jeanne; that cavalier looks to me to be the ambassador of the King, my august master."

"Yes, let us get on as fast as we can," said the young woman, who trembled at the idea of being separated from her husband.

But this was easier saying than doing. The trees were so thick as to form in front of them a wall of branches, and the soil was so sandy that the horses sank deep in it at every step.

Meanwhile, the horseman was coming on at a rattling pace, and they could hear his horse's gallop on the slope of the mountain.

"Good heavens! it's now clear that he's making for us," cried the young woman.

"By my faith!" said Saint-Luc, halting, "if that is the case, we may as well see what he wants, for, as it is, he could easily reach us on foot."

"He has stopped," said Jeanne.

"More than that; he has dismounted and is entering the wood, and by my soul, though he be the devil himself, I'll have a talk with him."

"Wait," said Jeanne, holding him back, "wait. I think he's calling to us."

She was right. The stranger, after tying his horse to a fir on the outskirt, entered the wood, shouting:

"Hullo! young gentleman! Devil take it, man, don't run away in that fashion. I'm bringing you something you lost."

"What is he saying?" asked the countess.

"Faith," answered Saint-Luc, "he says we lost something."

"I say, little gentleman," continued the stranger, "you lost a bracelet in the hostelry at Courville. And a woman's portrait, too! Such an article should not be lost that way, above all, a portrait of the respectable Madame de Cossé. In the name of that venerated parent, do not keep me running after you."

"Why, I know that voice!" cried Saint-Luc.

"And he is speaking of my mother."

"Then you lost a bracelet, darling?"

"Yes, unfortunately; I only missed it this morning, and could not remember where I had left it."

"It's Bussy, beyond a doubt," exclaimed Saint-Luc.

"The Comte de Bussy!" returned Jeanne, with feeling, — "our friend?"

"Certainly, it is our friend," said Saint-Luc, running with as much eagerness to meet the gentleman as he had lately shown to avoid him.

"Saint-Luc! I was not mistaken," cried Bussy, in his ringing voice, and, with a bound, he was beside the lovers.

"Good-day, madame," he continued, laughing heartily and offering the countess the portrait she had really forgotten in the hostelry at Courville, where it will be remembered our travellers spent a night.

"Have you come to arrest us by order of the King, M. de Bussy?" inquired Jeanne, smiling.

"I? Faith, no, I am not on sufficiently good terms with his Majesty for him to charge me with a confidential mission. No, when I found your bracelet at Courville, it occurred to me that you were on the road before me. Then I clapped spurs to my horse, saw two travellers, suspected they were you, and have chased you, though without wishing to do so. You forgive me?"

"So then," asked Saint-Luc, with a lingering suspicion, "it was chance that made you take the same road we did?"

"Chance," answered Bussy, "or, now that I have met you, I will rather say Providence."

All Saint-Luc's suspicions were overcome by the bright face and sincere smiles of the brave Bussy.

"So you are travelling?" said Jeanne.

"Yes," replied Bussy, leaping into the saddle.

"But not as we are?"

"No, unfortunately."

"I mean in disgrace. Where are you going?"

"In the direction of Angers. And you?"

"In the same direction."

"Ah, I understand. Brissac is about a dozen leagues from here, between Angers and Saumur, and you are naturally seeking a refuge in the paternal mansion, like hunted doves. It is

delightful, and I should envy your happiness, if envy were not such an abominable fault."

"Ah, M. de Bussy," said Jeanne, with a look of gratitude, "get married and you will be as happy as we are. It is so easy to be happy when you are loved."

And she turned her eyes on Saint-Luc with a smile, as if appealing to his testimony.

"Madame," answered Bussy, "I am rather distrustful of that sort of happiness. Every one is not as lucky as you have been in marrying by special license of the King."

"Oh, nonsense! a man like you, loved everywhere!"

"When a man is loved everywhere," said Bussy, with a sigh, "it is the same as being loved nowhere."

"Well," said Jeanne, with a look of intelligence at her husband, "let me marry you; in the first place, that would set many husbands I know at their ease, and, besides, I promise you that you will make acquaintance with that happiness which you believe does not exist."

"I do not deny that happiness exists, madame," said Bussy, sighing; "I only deny that it can exist for me."

"Will you let me marry you?" repeated the countess.

"If you marry me according to your taste, no; if according to mine, yes."

"You say that like a man wedded to single blessedness."

"Perhaps."

"Why, then, you must be in love with some woman you cannot marry?"

"Count," pleaded Bussy, "be merciful and beg Madame de Saint-Luc not to plunge a thousand daggers into my heart."

"Aha! Bussy, you had better look out, or I'll believe it's my wife you are in love with."

"In that case you will agree that as a lover I am full of delicacy, and that husbands have no reason to be jealous of me."

"Truer word was never spoken," answered Saint-Luc, remembering that it was Bussy who brought his wife to the Louvre. "But no matter, confess that some one has captured your heart."

"I confess it."

"A real love or only a fancy?" asked Jeanne.

"A passion, madame."

"I will cure you."

"I do not think so."

"I'll find you a wife."

"I doubt it."

"I will render you happier than you deserve to be."

"Alas! madame, at present my only happiness is to be unhappy."

"I warn you I am very obstinate," said Jeanne.

"And I also."

"Count, you will surrender."

"By the way, madame," said the young man, "had we not better get out of this sand pit? Then you might make for that charming village which you see shining yonder in the sunlight, and lodge there for the night."

"Just as you like."

"Oh, I have no preference in the matter!"

"Then you'll keep us company?"

"As far as the place where I am going; that is, if you have no objection."

"Not the least; quite the contrary. But why not come the whole way with us to where we are travelling?"

"And where are you traveling to?"

"To the Castle of Méridor."

Bussy's face flushed and then paled. In fact, his face became so livid that it was all over with his secret if Jeanne had not happened to be looking then at her husband with a smile.

While the two lovers were talking in the language of the eyes, Bussy had time to recover his self-control.

"To the Castle of Méridor, madame," said he, when he found sufficient strength to enable him to utter that name; "and what place is that?"

"It is the estate of one of my best friends," answered Jeanne.

"Of one of your best friends — and" — continued Bussy, "to whom does it belong?"

"Why," answered Madame de Saint-Luc, who was entirely ignorant of the events that had occurred at Méridor two months before, "is it possible you never heard of the Baron de Méridor, one of the wealthiest noblemen in Poitou, and" —

"And?" repeated Bussy, seeing that Jeanne paused.

"And of Diane de Méridor, the baron's daughter, and the most beautiful woman in the world?"

"No, madame," answered Bussy, almost choking from emotion.

And, while Jeanne was still gazing on her husband with a singular expression, this fine gentleman was wondering at the extraordinary good fortune that enabled him to meet on that road people who spoke of Diane — who echoed the only thought that held possession of his heart. Was it taking advantage of his credulity? that was not probable. Was it a snare? that was almost impossible. Saint-Luc was already far from Paris when he himself had made the acquaintance of Madame de Monsoreau and learned that her name was Diane de Méridor.

"And is this castle very far from here, madame?" asked Bussy.

"About seven leagues, I think; and I would offer to wager that it is there, and not in your little village shining in the sunlight, — in which, by the way, I have not the least confidence, — where we shall lodge this evening. You are coming, are you not?"

"Yes, madame."

"I'm glad of it. That is already a step toward the happiness I promised you."

Bussy bowed and kept near the young couple, who showed their gratitude by the delight they took in his company. For some time they were all silent. At length, Bussy, who had many things yet to learn, ventured to put a question. It was the privilege of his position, and he was determined to use it.

"And what sort of a man," he asked, "is this Baron de Méridor, whom you spoke of as being the wealthiest man in Poitou?"

"A perfect gentleman, a hero of the days of yore; a knight who, if he had lived in the days of King Arthur, would certainly have occupied a seat at the Round Table."

"And," again asked Bussy, controlling the muscles of his face and the emotion of his voice, "to whom is his daughter married?"

"His daughter married?"

"So I have asked."

"Diane married?"

"What is there extraordinary in that?"

"Nothing; but Diane is not married; certainly, I should be the first to be informed of it, if she were."

Bussy's heart swelled almost to bursting, and a painful sigh struggled to his throat and was strangled on its passage.

"Then," said he, "Mademoiselle de Méridor is in the castle with her father?"

"We have strong hopes she is," answered Saint-Luc, emphasizing his words to prove to his wife that he shared her ideas and associated himself with all her plans.

There was a moment's silence, during which each pursued a separate line of thought.

"Ah!" cried Jeanne, suddenly, rising in the stirrup, "yonder are the turrets of the castle. Look, look, M. de Bussy; you can catch a glimpse of them rising up from the middle of those leafless woods that will be so beautiful in another month. Do you see the slated roof?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," replied Bussy, with an emotion that astonished himself—for that brave heart had been, until a short time ago, somewhat insensible—"Yes, I see. So that is the Castle of Méridor?"

And by a natural mental reaction, at the aspect of this country, so rich and beautiful even when nature is most joyless, at the aspect of that lordly palace, he remembered the poor prisoner buried in the fogs of Paris and in the stifling retreat in the Rue Saint-Antoine.

And he sighed anew, but not altogether from sorrow. By promising him happiness, Madame de Saint-Luc had given him hope.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BEREAVED FATHER.

MADAME DE SAINT-LUC was not mistaken: in two hours they were in front of the Castle of Méridor. Ever since the last words interchanged by the travellers, Bussy was considering whether he should not confide to the good friends he had just met the story of the adventure which kept Diane away from Méridor. However, if he once began his revelations, he should not only have to tell what every one would soon know, but also what he alone knew, and was not inclined to tell anybody. He naturally recoiled, therefore, before a disclosure that would give rise to too many interpretations and questions.

And, moreover, Bussy wished to enter Meridor as a perfect stranger. He wanted to take M. de Meridor unawares, to hear him speak of M. de Monsereau and the *Trac d'Angou*: he wanted, in a word, to be convinced, not that the story of Diane was true, — he did not for a moment suspect that angel of purity of a falsehood, — but that she herself had not been deceived on some point or other, and that the narrative which had interested him so powerfully was a faithful interpretation of events.

Bussy, as will be seen, was actuated by two sentiments that, ever amid the aberrations of passion, enable the superior man to preserve his empire over himself and others: these two sentiments were his prudent circumspection in the presence of strangers and the profoundest reverence for the beloved object.

And so, Madame de Saint-Lun, deceived, in spite of her feminine clear-sightedness, by Bussy's perfect self-control, was persuaded that the young man had now heard for the first time the name of Diane, and that, as this name could not awaken within him either remembrance or hope, he no doubt expected to meet at Meridor some awkward country girl, who would be quite embarrassed in presence of her new guests.

Consequently, she looked forward to the pleasure of extracting a good deal of amusement from his astonishment.

But one thing surprised her: it was that when the guard blew a blast on his horn to announce visitors, Diane had not run at once to the drawbridge, as was her invariable custom in such cases.

Instead of Diane, a stooping old man, leaning on a staff, was seen advancing through the principal porch of the castle.

He had on a large green velvet coat faced with fur, and at his belt shone a silver whistle near a little bunch of keys.

The evening breeze lifted his long, snow-white hair.

He crossed the drawbridge, followed by two huge dogs of German breed, who walked behind him with slow and measured tread and lowered heads, never outstepping each other by an inch. When the old man reached the parapet:

"Who is there?" he asked, in a feeble voice, "and who does an old man the honor of visiting him?"

"It is I, Seigneur Augustin," cried the laughing voice of the young woman.

For this was the title Jeanne de Cosse used to give the

baron to distinguish him from his younger brother, who was called Guillaume, and had died only three years before.

But the baron, instead of answering with the joyous exclamation Jeanne had expected to hear, slowly shook his head, and fixing his undiscerning eyes on the travellers:

“You?” said he; “I do not see — who — you?”

“Good heavens!” cried Jeanne, “is it possible you do not recognize me? Ah, I forgot, — my disguise.”

“Excuse me,” said the old man, “but I hardly see at present. The eyes of the old are not made for weeping, and when they weep the tears burn them.”

“My dear baron,” said the young woman, “I can easily perceive that your sight is growing weak, else you would have recognized me even in my male uniform. Then, shall I have to tell you my name?”

“Yes, if you please,” he answered. “I have told you I scarcely see you.”

“Then you are going to find yourself nicely caught, Seigneur Augustin: I am Madame de Saint-Luc.”

“Saint-Luc!” said the old man, “I do not know you.”

“But my name before I was married,” said the smiling young woman, “was Jeanne de Cossé-Brissac.”

“Ah!” cried the old man, trying to open the gate with his trembling hands. “Ah! good God!”

Jeanne, who was puzzled by this strange reception, so different from what she expected, attributed it, however, to the decline of the old man’s faculties. She jumped from her horse, and threw herself into his arms, as had been her custom; but when she touched the baron’s cheeks she felt they were wet. He was weeping.

“With joy,” she thought. “Ah! the heart is always young.”

“Come,” said the old man, after embracing Jeanne.

And, as though he had not perceived her two companions, he proceeded toward the castle, followed by his two dogs, who had only time to scent and eye the visitors.

The castle had a singularly dismal aspect; all the shutters were closed, and it looked like an immense tomb. Such of the servants as made their appearance were dressed in black. Saint-Luc directed a glance of inquiry at his wife. Was this the condition in which she had expected to find the castle?

Jeanne understood, and as she was in a hurry herself to

solve this perplexing riddle, she approached the baron and took his hand.

"And Diane?" she inquired. "Am I so unlucky as to find her absent?"

The old man halted as if thunder stricken, and gazed on the young woman with an expression that almost resembled terror.

"Diane!" said he.

And suddenly, at that name, the two dogs on each side of their master raised their heads and uttered a doleful howl.

Bussy could not help shuddering. Jeanne looked at Saint-Luc, and Saint-Luc stood still, not knowing whether to advance or retreat.

"Diane!" repeated the old man, as if he had needed time to understand the question put to him, "then you do not know?"

And his weak, quivering voice died away in a sob wrung from the very depths of his heart.

"But what is the matter? What has happened?" cried Jeanne, greatly moved.

"Diane is dead!" cried the old man, raising his hands in a despairing gesture to heaven, and bursting into a flood of tears.

When he reached the door he sank down on the first steps, buried his face in his hands, rocking himself backward and forward, as if he could thereby chase away the dismal memories that were incessantly torturing him.

"Dead!" cried Jeanne, in dismay, turning as pale as a ghost.

"Dead!" said Saint-Luc, in tender compassion for the old man.

"Dead!" stammered Bussy. "Then he has let him believe she was dead. Ah, poor old man! how you will love me some day!"

"Dead! dead!" repeated the baron; "they killed her!"

"Ah! my dear baron," said Jeanne, who, after the terrible blow that had fallen upon her, had found the only relief that keeps the feeble hearts of women from breaking — tears.

And she broke into a tempest of sobs, bathing the old man's face with her tears as she hung about his neck.

The old baron stumbled to his feet.

"No matter," said he, "though the house be empty and desolate, it is not the less hospitable on that account; enter."

Jeanne took his arm, crossed the peristyle and the ancient guardroom, now a dining-room, and entered the drawing-room.

A servant, whose agitated countenance and reddened eyes gave evidence of his tender devotion to his master, walked in front, opening the doors ; Saint-Luc and Bussy followed.

On reaching the drawing-room, the old man sat down, or, rather, sank on his great carved armchair.

The servant opened a window to let in fresh air, and, instead of leaving the apartment, retired to a corner.

Jeanne did not dare to break the silence. She dreaded re-opening the old man's wounds if she were to question him ; and yet, like all who are young and happy, she could not bring herself to credit the reality of the misfortune that was announced to her. At a certain age it is impossible to sound the abysses of death, because death is scarcely believed in.

It was the baron who gave her an opportunity of renewing the conversation.

"You told me, my dear Jeanne, you were married ; is this gentleman your husband ?"

And he pointed to Bussy.

"No, *Seigneur Augustin*," answered Jeanne. "This is M. de Saint-Luc."

Saint-Luc bowed lower before the unhappy father than he ever would have done before the old man. The latter returned the salute in a fatherly manner, and even attempted to smile. Then, turning his glassy eyes on Bussy, he said to her :

"I suppose this gentleman is your brother, or brother-in-law, or one of your relations ?"

"No, my dear baron, this gentleman is not related to either of us, but he is our friend : M. Louis de Clermont, Comte de Bussy d'Amboise, gentleman of M. de Duc d'Anjou."

At these words the old man, springing to his feet, darted a terrible look at Bussy, and then, as if exhausted by this mute defiance, fell back exhausted on his chair with a groan.

"What is the meaning of this ?" asked Jeanne.

"Does the baron know you, M. de Bussy ?" inquired Saint-Luc.

"This is the first time I have had the honor of meeting M. de Méridor," was the composed reply of Bussy, who alone understood the effect produced on the old man by the mention of the Duc d'Anjou's name.

"Ah ! you are the Duc d'Anjou's gentleman," said the baron,

"you are the gentleman of that monster, that demon, and you dare to confess it, and you have the audacity to come into my presence!"

"Is he mad?" Saint-Luc asked his wife in a whisper, staring at the baron.

"His grief must have unsettled him," answered Jeanne, alarmed.

M. de Méridor had accompanied the words he had just uttered with a glance even more threatening than the one before, but Bussy, as calm as ever, met it with the same attitude of profound respect, and did not reply.

"Yes, that monster," continued M. de Méridor, becoming more and more excited, "that assassin who has murdered my daughter."

"Poor old man!" murmured Bussy.

"But what does he mean?" asked Jeanne, looking round.

"You stare at me with terrified eyes, but ah! you do not know," cried M. de Méridor, taking the hands of Jeanne and Saint-Luc and clasping them within his own. "The Duc d'Anjou has killed my Diane! the Duc d'Anjou. O my child! my daughter! he has killed her!"

And there was such pathos in the old man's voice as he uttered these words that the tears came to the eyes of Bussy himself.

"My dear baron," said the young woman, "though this were so, and I do not understand how it can be, it is impossible to charge M. de Bussy with this frightful misfortune, for he is the most loyal and noble-hearted gentleman living. Surely it is clear that M. de Bussy does not comprehend the meaning of what you say: look, he is weeping as we are, and for the same reason. Would he be here if he expected such a reception as you are giving him? Oh! dear Seigneur Augustin, in the name of your beloved Diane, tell us how this catastrophe has occurred."

"Then you did not know!" said the baron, addressing Bussy.

Bussy inclined without answering.

"Oh! surely no," exclaimed Jeanne, "every one was ignorant of this event."

"My Diane dead and her best friend ignorant of her death! But it is true I have not written of it to any one. It seemed to me as if the world ceased to exist when my daughter

no longer lived : it seemed to me as if the entire universe must have gone into mourning for my Diane."

"Speak, speak, it will relieve you," said Jeanne.

"Well," said the old man, sobbing, "that infamous prince, that dishonor to the nobility of France, saw my Diane, and, finding her beautiful, had her abducted and brought to the castle of Beaugé, intending to treat her as he would have treated the daughter of a serf. My Diane, my pure and noble Diane, preferred death. She flung herself from a window into the lake, and all that was found of her was her veil floating on the surface of the water."

And the tears and sobs of the old man while uttering the last sentence made the scene one of the most painful ever witnessed by Bussy, though he was a warrior and accustomed to shed blood and to see it shed.

Jeanne, who was almost fainting, looked at the count with a kind of dread.

"Oh, count, this is horrible, is it not?" cried Saint-Luc. "You must abandon that infamous prince. You have too noble a heart to remain the friend of a ravisher and an assassin."

The baron, somewhat soothed by these words, awaited the reply of Bussy, in order to form an opinion of that gentleman; the sympathetic words of Saint-Luc consoled him somewhat. A great moral crisis is often accompanied by great physical weakness, and a child bitten by a favorite dog will find some relief for its pain in seeing the dog that bit it beaten.

But Bussy, instead of answering Saint-Luc's appeal, advanced to M. de Méridor.

"M. le Baron," said he, "would you do me the honor of granting me a private interview?"

"Listen to M. de Bussy, my dear baron," said Jeanne, "you will see that he is good and will help you."

"Speak, monsieur," said the baron, trembling, for he perceived a strange significance in the expression of the young man's eyes.

Bussy turned to Saint-Luc and his wife, and addressing them in a tone of mingled dignity and kindness.

"Will you allow me?" said he.

The husband and wife left the room arm in arm, and feeling doubly thankful for their happiness in presence of so great a calamity.

When the door closed behind them, Bussy approached the baron and, with a profound inclination, said :

“ M. le Baron, you have just accused a prince whom I serve of a crime, and your accusation has been made in such violent terms that I am forced to ask you for an explanation.”

The old man started.

“ Oh, do not misunderstand the entirely respectful meaning of my words ; I speak them with the deepest sympathy, and it is with the most earnest desire to mitigate your sorrow that I say to you now : M. le Baron, tell me all the details of the lamentable catastrophe you have just related to Monsieur and Madame de Saint-Luc. Are you quite sure that everything has occurred in the manner you suppose and that all hope is lost ? ”

“ Monsieur,” returned the baron, “ I had once a moment’s hope. A noble and loyal gentleman, M. de Monsoreau, loved my daughter and did his best to save her.”

“ M. de Monsoreau, indeed ! Would you mind telling me what has been his conduct in this matter ? ”

“ Ah ! his conduct has been chivalrous and noble, for Diane had refused his hand. Yet he was the first to warn me of the duke’s infamous projects. It was he who showed me how to foil them. He asked only one reward for rescuing my daughter, and in this he proved the generosity and uprightness of his soul : he asked, should he succeed in delivering her from the Due d’Anjou, that I should give her to him in marriage, for only with a young, active, enterprising husband could she be saved from the prince, as her poor father was unable to protect her.

“ I gave my consent joyfully ; but, alas ! it was in vain ; he came too late, and only found my poor Diane saved from dishonor by death.”

“ And has M. de Monsoreau sent you any intelligence since that fatal moment ? ” asked Bussy.

“ It is but a month since this happened,” said the old man, “ and the poor gentleman has evidently not dared to appear before me after failing in his generous purpose.”

Bussy bent his head ; all was now plain to him.

He saw how it was that M. de Monsoreau had succeeded in carrying off from the prince the woman he loved, and how his fear of the prince discovering this young girl to be his own wife led him to spread the report of her death.

"And now, monsieur?" queried the baron, perceiving that the young man was absorbed in his thoughts and that his eyes, which had flashed more than once during the narrative, were riveted on the floor.

"And now, M. le Baron," answered Bussy, "I am commissioned by Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou to conduct you to Paris, where his Highness would speak with you."

"What! speak to me!" cried the baron. "What! look on that man's face after the death of my daughter! And what might this murderer want to say to me?"

"Who knows? Justify himself, perhaps."

"And though he could justify himself, monsieur, I should not go to Paris. No, no, it would be going too far from the spot where my child rests in her cold and watery grave."

"M. le Baron," said Bussy, firmly, "you must allow me to insist; it is my duty to conduct you to Paris, and I have come here expressly for that purpose."

"Well, then, I will go to Paris," cried the old man, trembling with anger; "but woe to those who have ruined me! The King shall hear me, or, if he refuses, I will appeal to all the gentlemen in France. And, by the way," he murmured in a lower tone, "I was forgetting in my sorrow that I have a weapon in my hand I have never had occasion to use until now. Yes, M. de Bussy, I will accompany you."

"And I, M. le Baron," said Bussy, taking his hand, "recommend to you the patience, calmness, and dignity that become a Christian nobleman. God is infinitely merciful to righteous hearts, and you know not what he has in store for you. I beg you also, while waiting for the day when his mercy shall be showered on you, not to reckon me among your enemies, for you know not what I am about to do for you. Till to-morrow, then, baron; and early in the morning we will start on our journey."

"I consent," replied the old nobleman, moved, in spite of himself, by the soft tones in which Bussy spoke; "but, meanwhile, friend or enemy, you are my guest, and I will escort you to your apartments."

And the baron seized a three-branched silver candlestick, and, with a heavy step, preceded Bussy d'Amboise up the principal staircase of the castle.

The dogs wished to follow; he stopped them with a gesture. Two servants followed Bussy with other candlesticks.

On arriving at the threshold of the room assigned him, the count asked what had become of M. de Saint-Luc and his wife.

"My old Germain has taken care of them," answered the baron. "I trust you will pass a pleasant night, M. le Comte."

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW RÉMY LE HAUDOUIN LEARNED WHAT WAS GOING ON IN THE HOUSE IN THE RUE SAINT-ANTOINE DURING BUSSY'S ABSENCE.

MONSIEUR AND MADAME DE SAINT-LUC were astounded. Bussy in the confidence of M. de Méridor! Bussy leaving for Paris with the old man! Bussy, in fine, suddenly assuming the direction of those affairs that were at first utterly foreign and strange to him! All this was to these young people an inexplicable phenomenon.

In the case of the baron, the magic power of that title: "Royal Highness," had wrought its ordinary effect; a gentleman of the time of Henry III. could hardly be expected to smile at scutcheons and differences of station.

"Royal Highness" meant for M. de Méridor, as it did, indeed, for every one except the King, something to be revered and even feared.

On the appointed morning, the baron took leave of his guests, bidding them to consider the castle theirs. But Saint-Luc and his wife were quite alive to the gravity of the situation and were determined to depart from Méridor whenever they conveniently could. As soon as the timid Maréchal de Brissac consented, they would settle down on the Brissac estate, which was but a short distance from Méridor.

As for Bussy, he could have justified his singular conduct in a second; Bussy, master of a secret he could reveal to whomsoever he pleased, resembled one of those Oriental sorcerers, who, with the first wave of their wand draw tears from every eye, and, with the second, convulse their audience with laughter.

The second which, as we have said, would have been all Bussy required to work such wondrous transformations was

utilized by him for the dropping of a few words into the ear which the charming wife of Saint-Luc held greedily to his lips.

These few words uttered, Jeanne's countenance brightened up marvellously: a lovely tint colored her cheeks and brow, and the coral of her lips opened to disclose her little white teeth, which glistened like pearls; her bewildered spouse looked at her inquiringly, but she laid a finger on her mouth and fled, blowing a kiss of gratitude to Bussy on the way.

The old man had seen nothing of this expressive pantomime. With his eyes riveted on his ancestral manor, he caressed in an absent-minded way his two dogs, who could hardly be got to leave him. He gave some directions to his servants, who, with bent heads, awaited his orders and his farewells. Then, mounting with his groom's assistance, and with great difficulty, and old piebald horse of which he was very fond, for it had been his warhorse in the late civil wars, he saluted the castle of Méridor with a gesture, and started without a word.

Bussy, with sparkling eyes, replied to the smiles of Jeanne, and frequently turned round to bid good-by to his friends. As he was quitting the castle, Jeanne had said to him in a whisper:

"What a singular man you are, Seigneur Count! I promised you that you should find happiness in Méridor. And it is you, on the contrary, who are bringing back to Méridor the happiness that had fled from it."

It is a long road from Méridor to Paris, long, especially, to an old man riddled with musket-balls and slashed with sword-cuts in rough conflicts from which no warrior emerged unwounded. It was a long road also to that dignified piebald who answered to the name of Garnac and proudly raised his head when called by it, with a haughty flash still in his weary eyes.

Once started, Bussy set about capturing the heart of this old man, who had at first hated him, and his filial care and attentions had doubtless some success, for on the morning of the sixth day, just as they were entering Paris, M. de Méridor said to his travelling companion these words, words significant of the change the journey had wrought in his mind:

"It is singular, count; I am nearer than ever to the source of my misfortunes, and yet I feel less anxiety at the end than I did at the beginning of my journey."

"In two hours more, M. le Baron," said Bussy, "you shall have judged me as I would be judged by you."

The travellers entered Paris by the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, as did almost every one at the time, because this horrible quarter, the ugliest in the city, seemed the most Parisian of all, on account of its numerous churches, its thousand picturesque houses and its little bridges built over sewers.

"Where are we going?" asked the baron; "to the Louvre, I suppose."

"Monsieur," said Bussy, "I must ask you to come first to my hotel. After you have had some refreshment and repose you will be in a better condition to meet in a becoming manner the person I am leading you to."

The baron was patient and submissive, and Bussy brought him to the hotel in the Rue de Grenelle Saint-Monré.

The count's people were not expecting him, or rather, no longer expected him: returning in the night through a little door of which he alone had the key, he had saddled his horse himself and left without seeing any one, except Rémy le Handouin. It can be easily understood, therefore, that his sudden disappearance, the dangers he had encountered during the preceding week, sufficiently evidenced by his wound, and his adventurous disposition, which was incorrigible, had all led many to believe that he had fallen into some trap laid by his enemies, that fortune, so long on his side, had deserted him, and that Bussy had died in silence and loneliness, shot by an arquebuse or pierced by a dagger.

So dubious were his best friends and most faithful servants of his situation that some of them were offering up novenas for his return to the light of day, a return that seemed to them more hazardous than that of Pyrihoüs; while others, more certain of his fate, and expecting to discover only his dead body, were making the most minute investigations in sewers and suspicious-looking cellars, in the quarries outside the city, in the bed of the Bièvre and the ditches of the Bastile.

When inquiries were made at his hotel, a certain person was always ready with this answer:

"M. le Comte is well."

But if the questions were pushed further, this person replied that he had told all he knew, and the questioner had to be content.

Now this person, who had to submit to many insults and

ironical compliments, because of the brevity of his cheerful assurance, was no other than Maître Rémy le Haudouin, who was in and out of the hotel several times a day and several times a night as well, always returning in high spirits and communicating a little of his own gayety to the gloomy mansion.

Le Haudouin, after one of his disappearances, returned to the hotel just at the moment when shouts of joy were resounding from the court of honor, where the lackeys were throwing themselves on Bussy's horse, ready to fight for the privilege of being his groom, for the count, instead of alighting, remained on horseback.

"Oh, I am aware you are glad to see me alive," said Bussy; "thanks. But you are not quite sure it is really I; well, see, touch, but do so quickly. Good; now help that gentleman from his horse, and be careful about it, for I wish you to know I reverence him more than a prince."

Bussy sounded the praises of the old man just in the nick of time; the servants at first paid hardly any attention to him; his modest garb, quite out of the fashion, and his piebald horse could hardly be expected to be looked on with respect by people who put the horses of the magnificent Bussy every day through their paces, and so they were tempted to regard the baron as some retired provincial squire their adventurous lord had brought out of exile as out of another world.

But no sooner had Bussy spoken than all were in a hurry to wait upon the old man. Le Haudouin looked on, laughing in his sleeve according to his custom, and only the gravity of his master could reduce the gay young doctor to a becoming seriousness.

"Quick, a room for monseigneur," said Bussy.

"Which one?" asked half a dozen voices together.

"The best — my own."

And he offered his arm to the baron as the latter was ascending the staircase, doing his best to show him even more honor than had been shown himself.

M. de Méridor found it impossible to resist this winning courtesy, just as we find it impossible to keep from gliding down the slope of certain dreams which conduct us to those fantastic countries, the realms of imagination and night.

The count's golden goblet was set before the baron, and Bussy was about to crown it with the wine of hospitality.

"Thanks, thanks, monsieur," said the old man; "but are we going soon to the appointed interview?"

"Yes, soon: do not be uneasy, M. de Méridor. this meeting will bring happiness not only to you but to me."

"What are you saying, and how is it you are always speaking a language I do not understand?"

"I say, monseigneur, that I have spoken to you of a Providence that is merciful to noble hearts. and that the moment is drawing nigh when I shall, in your name, appeal to that Providence."

The baron looked at Bussy in bewilderment; but, with a respectful gesture that meant: I return in a moment, Bussy smilingly bowed himself out.

As he expected, Rémy was at the door; he took the young man's arm and led him into a study.

"Well, my dear Hippocrates," he inquired, "how do matters stand at present?"

"Matters where?"

"*Parbleu!* in the Rue Saint-Antoine."

"Monseigneur, we are at a point that, I presume, must have an interest for you; but otherwise there is nothing new."

Bussy breathed.

"Then the husband has n't returned?" said he.

"Oh, yes, he has, but met with no success. There is a father in the business, and his appearance, it seems, is expected to clinch the matter; he is the god who is to descend some fine morning in a machine, and this unknown god, in the person of an absent father, is looked forward to impatiently."

"Good," said Bussy: "but how do you know all that?"

"Well, monseigneur," answered Rémy, in his usual frank, lively fashion, "you see your absence turned my position into a sinecure for the time: I wanted to improve the moments left me for your advantage."

"Tell me what you have done, then, my dear Rémy: I am listening."

"With pleasure. After you left, I got some money, books, and a sword together, and brought them to a little room I had hired in a house at the corner of the Rue Saint-Antoine and the Rue Saint-Catherine."

"Good!"

"From there I had a full view of the house you know of — could see everything from the ventilators to the chimneys."

"Very good, indeed!"

"As soon as I was in my room, I took my post at the window."

"Splendid!"

"Yes; but the splendidness was marred by a little difficulty."

"I saw that I was seen; and, on the whole, it was quite natural it should look a little suspicious for a man to be always gazing on the same prospect; such persistence would result in his being taken, at the end of two or three days, for a thief, a lover, a spy, or a madman" —

"Admirably reasoned, my dear Rémy; and what did you do then?"

"Oh, then, M. le Comte, I perceived the time had come for desperate remedies, and, faith" —

"What?"

"I fell in love!"

"You fell in love?" inquired Bussy, puzzled to know how his falling in love could help him.

"Fell in love," repeated the young doctor, "as I have the honor of telling you; oh! deeply in love, madly in love."

"With whom?"

"With Gertrude."

"Gertrude, Madame de Monsoreau's maid?"

"Well, yes, no doubt about it,—with Madame de Monsoreau's *maid*. I am not a gentleman, monseigneur; you don't expect me to fall in love with the mistresses, do you? I am but a poor little doctor with a single patient, and I hope that patient will need my services only at exceedingly long intervals; so, whatever experiments I make must be made *in anima vili*, as we used to say at the Sorbonne."

"My poor Rémy," said Bussy, "you are pretty sure I appreciate your devotion, are you not?"

"Well, after all, I am not so much to be pitied, monseigneur," answered Le Haudouin. "Gertrude is a fine slip of a girl, just two inches taller than myself, and able to lift me from the ground by the collar of my coat with her own two hands, which phenomenon finds its explanation in the extraordinary development of the muscles of her biceps and her deltoïd. All this has inspired me with a veneration for the maiden which flatters her, and, as I am always of her opinion, we never quarrel. Then she has a priceless talent" —

"What is it, my poor Rémy?"

"She has marvellous skill in narrative."

"Ah! you don't say so?"

"Yes, indeed; and so, through her, I know all that passes in the house of her mistress. Ha! what do you say to that? It struck me you might not be displeased to have the means of learning what was going on there."

"Le Haudouin, you are the good genius whom chance, or rather Providence, has thrown in my way. Then you and Gertrude are on terms of"—

"*Puella me diligit*," replied Rémy, strutting about with an air of affected dandyism.

"And you are received in the house."

"Last night, at twelve, I effected my first entrance, on tiptoe, by the famous wicket door you know of."

"And how did you win this happiness?"

"Oh, in the most natural way. I suppose I ought to tell you."

"Yes, do."

"Two days after you left, and on the next morning after I took possession of my little room, I stood at the door, waiting for the lady of my future thoughts to go a-marketing, which, I was aware, happened every day between eight and nine. At ten minutes past eight exactly, she made her appearance; whereupon, I descended from my observatory and hastened to place myself on her path."

"And she recognized you?"

"I should say she did: she gave a scream and fled!"

"And then?"

"Then I ran after her, and came up with her. I had to put my best leg foremost, though; she 's a fast racer. But, luckily, a petticoat is sometimes embarrassing.

"'Good God!' she cried.

"'Holy Virgin!' I shouted.

"My exclamation gave her a good opinion of me; a person of less piety would have cried: '*Morbleu!*' or '*Corbœuf!*'"

"'The doctor!' she said.

"'The charming housekeeper!' I answered.

"She smiled, but recovering herself—

"'You are mistaken, monsieur,' said she, 'I do not know you.'

"'But, alas!' I returned, 'I know you, and, for the last

three days I live, I exist but for you. To such a degree do I adore you that I no longer dwell in the Rue Beautreillis, and I am now in the Rue Saint-Antoine, corner of the Rue Saint-Catherine, having changed my lodgings solely in the hope of seeing you come out and go in. Should you again need my services in dressing the wounds of handsome young gentlemen you must look for me at my new residence and not at the old one.'

" 'Hush !' she said.

" 'Ah, you see you know me !' I answered.

" And that is how our acquaintance was made, or rather, renewed."

" So that now you are " —

" As happy as a lover can be — with Gertrude, you understand ; everything is relative. But I am more than happy, I am simply in ecstasies at the thought that I have succeeded in doing for you what I proposed doing."

" But will she not suspect ? "

" No, I have not even spoken of you. Now, is it a likely thing that such a poor creature as Rémy le Handouin should be acquainted with noble lords like the Seigneur de Bussy ? No, all I did was to ask her once, in an offhand way : ' Is your young master better ? '

" ' What young master ? ' she said.

" ' The gentleman I attended in your house ? '

" ' He is not my young master,' she answered.

" ' Oh, as he was in your mistress's bed, I thought ' —

" ' Mercy on us ! no ; poor young man ! ' she sighed, ' he was nothing to us at all, and we have only seen him once since.'

" ' Then you do not know his name ? ' I inquired.

" ' Oh, yes, we do, indeed ! '

" ' You might have known and forgotten it ? '

" ' It is not one of those names you forget.'

" ' Why, what is it, then ? '

" ' Have you ever heard of the Seigneur de Bussy ? '

" ' I should think so ! Bussy, so it was the brave Bussy ? '

" ' Yes, it was he.'

" ' Hum ! and the lady ? '

" ' My mistress is married, monsieur.'

" ' Oh, a woman may be married and may be faithful, yet think, now and then, of some handsome young man she has

seen — were it but for a moment, especially when that handsome young man was wounded, interesting, and lying in our bed.’

“ ‘Well, to be frank with you,’ answered Gertrude, ‘I will not say my mistress does not think of him.’ ”

Bussy’s face flushed all over.

“ ‘We even talk about him,’ added Gertrude, ‘whenever we are alone.’ ”

“ ‘Excellent girl!’ ” cried the count.

“ ‘And what do you say of him,’ I asked.

“ ‘I speak of his feats of valor, and that is not difficult, since nothing is talked about in Paris but the sword thrusts he gives and receives. I even taught my mistress a little song concerning him which is all the rage at present.’

“ ‘Ah, I know it,’ I answered, ‘does it not run thus? —

“ ‘ “As a picker of quarrels
D’Amboise has won laurels
Yet — give Bussy his due —
He is tender and true!” ’ ”

“ ‘The way it runs, exactly!’ exclaimed Gertrude. ‘Well! my mistress sings nothing else now.’ ”

Bussy wrung the young doctor’s hand; an ineffable thrill of happiness coursed through his veins.

“Is that all?” he asked, so insatiable is man in his desires.

“That is all, monseigneur. Oh, I’ll learn more later on; but, confound it! one can’t learn everything in a day — or rather, in a night.”

CHAPTER XXV.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

RÉMY’s report made Bussy very happy; and naturally, for it told him two things: M. de Monsoreau was as much hated as ever, and he, Bussy, was already better liked than formerly.

And then, the friendship of this young man for him was a joy to his heart. Our entire being expands under the influence of heaven-born sentiments, and our intellectual powers acquire a twofold strength. We feel we are happy, because we feel we are good.

Bussy saw that there was no time to be lost now, and that every pang which rended the old man's heart was almost a sacrilege. There is such an inversion of the laws of nature in the tears of a father for a daughter's death, that he who could console that father with a word, yet withholds that word, deserves the curse of every father.

On descending into the court, M. de Méridor found a fresh horse which Bussy had ordered to be got ready for him. Another horse was waiting for Bussy: both of them were soon in the saddle, and set out, followed by Rémy.

They turned into the Rue Saint-Antoine, their progress being a source of ever-increasing astonishment to M. de Méridor. The worthy nobleman had not been in Paris for twenty years, and what with the noise of horses and the cries of lackeys and the passage of coaches, all in greater numbers than he had ever had any experience of before, he found Paris very much changed since Henri II's. time.

But in spite of his astonishment, which bordered closely on admiration, the baron did not feel the less sad, and his sadness increased as he approached the unknown goal of his journey. How would the duke receive him, and would this interview be but the precursor of new sorrows?

Then, as he glanced at Bussy from time to time, he wondered what strange hallucination had forced him to follow blindly the servant of a prince to whom he owed all his misfortunes. Would it not have been more consistent with his dignity to have braved the Duc d'Anjou, and instead of accompanying Bussy wherever the latter chose to lead him, to have gone straight to the Louvre and thrown himself at the feet of the King? What could the prince say to him? What consolation could he give him? Was he not one of those who try to assuage with the balsam of honeyed words the pain of the wounds they have made, wounds that bleed with a sharper agony when the sufferer is outside their presence?

In this way they reached the Rue Saint-Paul. Bussy, like a prudent captain, sent Rémy in advance with orders to reconnoitre the approaches and lay plans for entering the fortress.

Rémy, after seeing Gertrude, returned with the intelligence that there was no sign of the enemy either in the alley or on the staircase or corridor that led to Madame de Monsoreau's chamber.

All these consultations, as will be easily understood, were held in a low voice between Bussy and Le Haudouin.

During this time the baron was looking in amazement around him.

"Is it possible," he wondered, "that the Duc d'Anjou can lodge in such a place as this?"

And the shabby appearance of the house inspired him with a feeling of distrust.

"No, monseigneur," answered Bussy, with a smile, "but though it is not his residence, it is that of a lady he has loved."

The old gentleman's brow became clouded.

"Monsieur," he said, halting, "we provincials are not used to things of this sort, the easy morals of Paris frighten us, and we do not feel at all comfortable in presence of your mysteries. If the Duc d'Anjou desires to meet the Baron de Méridor, he must meet him in his palace and not in the house of one of his mistresses. And then," added the old man, with a heavy sigh, "why do you, who seem an honest man, attempt to confront me with one of his women? Is it for the purpose of assuring me that my poor Diane would be alive still, if, like the mistress of yonder abode, she had preferred shame to death?"

"Come, come, M. le Baron," said Bussy, with that frank, loyal smile which had been his best auxiliary in gaining an influence over the old man, "do not hazard false conjectures. I pledge you my honor as a gentleman. You are altogether mistaken in your surmises. The lady you are about to see is a perfectly virtuous lady, who is worthy of all your respect."

"But who is she?"

"She is — the wife of a gentleman with whom you are acquainted."

"Really? But why do you say the prince has loved her?"

"Because I always say the truth, M. le Baron: enter and you will see for yourself whether I have accomplished what I promised you."

"Take care, I was weeping for my darling child, and you said: 'Be consoled, monsieur, the mercies of God are great;' to promise that I should be consoled was almost to promise a miracle."

"Enter, monsieur," repeated Bussy, with the smile that always fascinated the old gentleman.

The baron dismounted.

Gertrude had run to the door and stood open-mouthed on the threshold. She stared in dismay at Rémy, Bussy, and the old man, utterly unable to understand how Providence had contrived to bring these three men together.

"Inform Madame de Monsoreau," said the count, "that M. de Bussy has returned and desires to speak to her immediately. But, for your life," he whispered, "do not say a word of the person who is with me."

"Madame de Monsoreau!" said the baron, astounded, "Madame de Monsoreau!"

"Enter, M. le Baron," said Bussy, pushing him into the alley.

Then, as the old man climbed the stairs with tottering steps, was heard the voice of Diane, who was answering in tones that trembled strangely:

"M. de Bussy, you say, Gertrude? M. de Bussy? Very well, show him in."

"That voice!" cried the baron, suddenly stopping in the middle of the stairs. "That voice! Great God!"

"Go on, M. le Baron," said Bussy.

But at that very moment, just as the baron was clinging to the banisters and looking around him, at the head of the stairs, in the dazzling sheen of a golden sunlight, appeared Diane, more beautiful than ever, with a smile on her lips, although she little expected to see her father.

At this sight, which he took for some magic vision, the old man uttered a terrible cry, and with arms outstretched, with haggard eyes, he presented such a perfect image of horror and delirium that Diane, who was ready to fall upon his neck, paused in wonder and dismay.

The old man's hand, as he extended it, came in contact with Bussy's shoulder, and he leaned on it.

"Diane alive!" he murmured. "Diane, my own Diane, whom I thought dead. O God! O God!"

And this robust warrior, — this doughty hero of foreign and civil wars, from which he had almost escaped unscathed, — this aged oak left standing by the lightning-stroke of Diane's death, — this athlete who had wrestled so energetically with sorrow, — was crushed, broken, annihilated by joy: his knees sank under him, he was falling backwards, and but for Bussy would have been hurled to the bottom of the staircase, and all

because of the sight of that beloved image that shone, blurred and confused, before his eyes.

"Good heavens! M. de Bussy," cried Diane, hurrying down the steps that separated her from her father, "what is the matter with my father?"

And the young woman, terrified by his livid aspect and the strange effect produced by a meeting for which she thought they had both been prepared, questioned with her eyes even more than with her voice.

"M. de Méridor believed you dead, and he wept for you, madame, as such a father should weep for such a daughter."

"What!" cried Diane, "and did no one undeceive him?"

"No one."

"Oh, no one, no one!" cried the old man, awakening from his passing stupor, "no one, not even M. de Bussy."

"Ungrateful!" said the young gentleman, in a tone of mild reproach.

"Oh, yes," answered the baron, "yes, you are right, for this is a moment which repays me for all my sorrows. Oh, Diane! Diane! my darling!" he continued, drawing his daughter's head to his lips with one hand and offering the other to Bussy.

Then suddenly drawing himself up, as if a painful memory or a new fear had penetrated to his heart in spite of the armor of joy, which, if we may use the expression, had just enveloped him, he said:

"But what was that you were saying, M. de Bussy, about going to see Madame de Monsoreau? Where is she?"

"Alas! father," murmured Diane.

Bussy collected all his strength.

"She is before you," said he "and the Comte de Monsoreau is your son-in-law."

"Eh? what?" stammered the old man, "M. de Monsoreau my son-in-law, and everybody, — even you yourself, Diane, — has left me in ignorance of it."

"I dreaded writing to you, father, for fear the letter should fall into the prince's hands. Besides, I thought you knew everything."

"But what is the meaning of it all? Why all these strange mysteries?"

"Yes, father," cried Diane, "why has M. de Monsoreau allowed you to think I was dead? Why has he left you in ignorance of the fact that he was my husband?"

The baron, trembling, as if he feared to sound the depths of this dark secret, looked inquiringly, but timidly, into his daughter's sparkling eyes, and then at the keen, melancholy face of Bussy.

During all this time they had been moving slowly to the drawing-room.

"M. de Monsoreau my son-in-law!" the baron continued to repeat, utterly bewildered.

"That should not surprise you," answered Diane, in a tone of gentle reproach; "did you not order me to marry him, father?"

"Yes, if he saved you."

"Well! he has saved me," said Diane, in a hollow voice, falling back on a seat near her *prie-Dieu*; "if not from misfortune, at least from shame."

"Then why did he let me believe you dead, when he knew how bitter was my grief?" repeated the old man. "Why did he let me die of despair, when one word, yes, a single word, would have restored me to life?"

"Oh! there is some treacherous snare hidden beneath all this," cried Diane, "But you will not leave me, father? You will protect me, M. de Bussy, will you not?"

"Alas! madame," answered Bussy, bowing, "it is no longer possible for me to enter into your family secrets. In view of the strange manœuvres of your husband, it was my duty to find you a protector you could acknowledge. In search of that protector, I went to Méridor. You are now with your father; I withdraw."

"He is right," said the old man, sadly.

"M. de Monsoreau was afraid of the Duc d'Anjou's anger, and M. de Bussy is afraid of it now."

Diane flashed a glance at the young man, and this glance signified:

"Are you whom they call 'the brave Bussy' afraid, like M. de Monsoreau, of the Duc d'Anjou?"

Bussy understood that glance and smiled.

"M. le Baron," said he, "excuse, I beg, this singular question I am about to ask, and you, madame, pardon me, in consideration of my desire to render you a service."

Father and daughter exchanged a look and waited.

"M. le Baron," resumed Bussy, "I will entreat you to ask Madame de Monsoreau" —

And he emphasized the last three words in a way that drove the color from the young woman's cheek. Bussy saw Diane's distress, and continued :

"Ask your daughter if she be happy in the marriage she contracted in obedience to your orders."

Diane wrung her hands and sobbed. It was the only reply she could give to Bussy. It is true, however, that no other reply could be so positive.

The eyes of the old baron filled with tears. He was at last aware that his too hasty friendship for Monsoreau was the chief cause of his daughter's unhappiness.

"Now," said Bussy, "is it true, M. le Baron, that, enforced by treachery or violence, you gave your daughter's hand to M. de Monsoreau?"

"Yes, if he saved her."

"And he did save her. Then it is needless for me to ask, monsieur, if you intend to keep your promise?"

"To keep a promise is a law for all, but especially for gentlemen, as you must know better than anybody else, M. de Bussy. M. de Monsoreau has, by her own admission, saved my daughter's life; then my daughter must belong to M. de Monsoreau."

"Ah!" murmured the young woman, "would I were dead!"

"Madame," said Bussy, "you see I was right and have nothing further to do here. M. le Baron promised you to M. de Monsoreau, and you yourself also promised him your hand whenever you saw your father again safe and well."

"Ah! M. de Bussy, do not rend my heart," said the young woman, approaching the count; "my father does not know that I fear this man; my father does not know that I hate him; my father persists in regarding this man as my savior, and I, enlightened by my instincts, regard him as my executioner."

"Diane! Diane!" cried the baron, "he saved you!"

"Yes," exclaimed Bussy, whom prudence and delicacy had restrained until now, "yes, but what if the danger were less great than you supposed? what if this danger were unreal? what if — but what do we know, really? Listen, baron, there is some mystery in all this which requires to be dispelled, and which I will dispel. But I protest to you that if I had had the happiness of standing in M. de Monsoreau's place, I would have saved your beautiful and innocent daughter from dis-

honor, and, by the God who hears me, I never should have dreamed of exacting from her a price for such a service."

"He loved her," said M. le Baron, who, nevertheless, saw how odious had been M. de Monsoreau's conduct, "and many things done for the sake of love may be excused."

"And what about me!" cried Bussy, "may not I!" —

But frightened at the thought of what was about to escape from his heart, Bussy stopped; however, the thought that sparkled in his eyes completed the phrase that had been interrupted on his lips.

Diane read it there, read it more clearly than if it had been spoken.

"Well!" she said, blushing. "you have understood me, have you not? Friend, brother! — two titles you have claimed and which I freely grant — ah! my friend and brother, can you do anything for me?"

"But the Duc d'Anjou! the Duc d'Anjou!" murmured the old man, who considered the wrath of a royal prince to be fully as dangerous as a thunderbolt.

"I am not one of those who fear the anger of princes, M. le Baron," replied the young man; "and I am very much mistaken if we have to dread any such anger. If you wish, M. de Méridor, I will make you and the prince such friends that he will protect you against M. de Monsoreau, from whom comes, believe me, the real danger, a danger unknown but certain, invisible but, perhaps, inevitable."

"But if the duke learns Diane is alive all is lost," said the old man.

"Well, well, then," said Bussy, "I see, notwithstanding what I have said, your belief in M. de Monsoreau is stronger than your belief in me. It is useless to talk of the matter further; you may reject my offer, M. le Baron. you may fling away the powerful protection I can summon to your aid, and throw yourself into the arms of the man who has so well justified your confidence. As I have said before, I have accomplished my task, I have nothing further to do here. Adieu, monseigneur, adieu, madame, you will never see me more."

"Oh!" cried Diane, taking the young man by the hand, "have you ever seen me waver for an instant? have you ever seen me give way to him? No. I beg you on my knees, M. de Bussy, do not forsake me, do not abandon me."

Bussy seized the beautiful, beseeching hands, and all his

anger melted as melts the snow on the mountain crest beneath the ardent gaze of the sun.

"Then be it so, madame, I am well content!" said Bussy. "Yes, I accept the sacred mission you have confided to me, and in three days — for I must have time to join the prince, who is said to have gone on a pilgrimage to Chartres along with the King — in three days you shall see me again, or the name of Bussy shall never again be spoken."

Then, intoxicated by his feelings, and with flaming eyes, he drew near Diane and whispered:

"We are allied against this Monsoreau; remember it was not he who brought you back your father, and be faithful."

With one parting clasp of the baron's hand, he hurried out of the apartment.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT AWOKE AND HOW HE WAS RECEIVED IN HIS CONVENT.

WE left our friend Chicot ecstatically admiring Brother Gorenflot's unbroken sleep and superb snoring; he made a sign to the innkeeper to retire and carry the light with him, after warning him not to say a word to the worthy brother of his departure at ten last evening, and his return at three in the morning.

Now, Maître Bonhomet had noticed that, whatever might be the relation between the monk and the jester, it was always the jester who paid, and so he naturally held the jester in great respect, while, on the contrary, he held the monk in but slight esteem.

Consequently, he promised not to let a single syllable cross his lips about the events of the night, and retired, leaving the two friends in darkness, as he had been ordered.

Chicot soon became aware of a fact that aroused his admiration: Brother Gorenflot snored and spoke at the same time, which phenomenon argued, not as might be supposed, a conscience stung with remorse, but a stomach overladen with creature comforts.

The words uttered by Gorenflot in his sleep, when tagged

together, formed a frightful mixture of sacred eloquence and bacchanalian maxims.

However, Chicot saw it would be almost impossible, in such palpable darkness, to restore Gorenflot his belongings and at the same time keep him from suspecting anything when he awoke; he might step imprudently, during the operation, on some one of the monk's four limbs, for he could not discern their exact position, and so might startle him out of his lethargy.

Chicot, then, blew on the coals in the brazier to light up the room a little.

At the sound of that blowing, Gorenflot stopped snoring and murmured :

"Brethren, this is a mighty wind; it is the wind of the Lord, it is his breath inspiring me."

And he betook himself to snoring again.

Chicot waited a moment for sleep to resume its sway, and then set to work divesting the monk of his wrappers.

"My stars!" said Gorenflot, "but this is a cold day! I'm afraid it will hinder the grapes from ripening."

Chicot stopped in the midst of his work, which he resumed a moment later.

"You know my zeal, brethren," continued the monk, "for the Church and the Due de Guise."

"You beast!" interjected Chicot.

"You know what my opinions are," resumed Gorenflot, "and it is certain" —

"What is certain?" asked Chicot, as he raised up the monk to put on his frock.

"It is certain that man is stronger than wine. Brother Gorenflot has wrestled with wine as Jacob wrestled with the angel, and Brother Gorenflot has overcome the wine."

Chicot shrugged his shoulders.

This untimely movement made the monk open his eyes. He saw Chicot's face, which, in that weird light, looked wan and sinister.

"Ah!" said the monk. "I won't have any ghosts or hobgoblins!" as if he were remonstrating with some familiar demon who was not keeping his engagements.

"He is dead drunk," said Chicot, getting the frock on him at last and pulling the cowl over his head.

"Aha!" grumbled the monk, "the sacristan has closed the door of the choir and the wind has stopped blowing in."

"Whether you keep awake or go to sleep now," said Chicot, "is all one to me."

"The Lord has heard my prayer," murmured the monk, "and the north wind which he sent to freeze the vines is changed to a gentle zephyr."

"Amen!" said Chicot.

And making a pillow of the napkins and a sheet of the table-cloth, after arranging the empty bottles and dirty dishes as they would naturally be scattered about, he lay down to sleep beside his companion.

The strong sunlight that beat upon his eyelids, and the echo of the shrill voice of the innkeeper scolding the scullions in the kitchen, at length pierced the thick vapor which had paralyzed the senses of Gorenflot.

He turned, and with the aid of his own two hands, managed to settle down on that part which prescient nature hath given to man to be his principal centre of gravity.

Having achieved this result triumphantly, though not without difficulty, Gorenflot's eyes rested contemplatively on the significant disorder in which lay plates and dishes and bottles, then on Chicot, one of whose arms was gracefully flung over his eyes in such a manner that he saw everything and did not lose a single movement of the monk, while the perfectly natural way in which he snored did honor to that talent of his for mimicry to which we have already done justice.

"Broad daylight!" cried the monk; "*corbleu!* broad daylight! Why, I must have spent the night here!"

Then, collecting his ideas:

"And the abbey!" said he; "oh! oh!"

He began tightening the cord of his frock, a task Chicot had not thought he was obliged to attend to.

"Well, well," he muttered, "what a queer kind of dream I had! I thought I was dead and wrapped in a shroud stained with blood."

Gorenflot was not entirely mistaken.

When but half awake, he had taken the table-cloth in which he was bundled up for a shroud and the spots of wine on it for drops of blood.

"Luckily, it was but a dream," said Gorenflot, with another glance around the room.

During this inspection his eyes again rested on Chicot, who, feeling the eyes of the monk on him, snored with redoubled force.

"Is n't a drunkard a splendid creature!" said Gorenflot, admiringly.

"How happy he must be to sleep so soundly!" he added. "Ah! he's not in such a pickle as I'm in!"

And he sighed as loudly as Chicot snored, so that, if the jester had been really asleep, it must have wakened him.

"What if I were to rouse him up and ask his advice?" thought the monk. "He is a man of good counsel."

Chicot exerted all his powers, and his snores, which had attained the pitch of an organ diapason, swelled to a thunder roar.

"No," resumed Gorenflot, "he'd have the upper hand of me ever after, and I ought to be able to invent a decent lie myself."

"But whatever lie I invent," continued the monk, "it will be no easy thing for me to escape the dungeon, and the bread and water that will follow. If I even had a little money to bribe the brother jailer!"

Which hearing, Chicot adroitly drew a rather well-filled purse from his pocket and slipped it under his back.

The precaution was not useless; with a longer face than ever, Gorenflot approached his friend and murmured these melancholy words:

"If he were awake he would not refuse me a crown; but his repose is sacred to me and must not be disturbed — I'll take it."

And thereupon, Brother Gorenflot fell on his knees, leaned over Chicot, and softly felt the sleeper's pockets.

Chicot did not think it a time to follow the example of his companion and appeal to his familiar demon; he let him search at his ease in both pockets of his doublet.

"Strange!" said the monk, "nothing in the pockets! — ah! in the hat, perhaps."

While the monk was investigating the hat, Chicot emptied the purse into his hand, and then slipped it into his breeches' pocket.

"Nothing in the hat!" exclaimed Gorenflot, "that amazes me. My friend Chicot, who is a most sagacious fool, never goes out without money."

"Oho! I have it!" said he, with a smile that distended his mouth from ear to ear, "I was forgetting the breeches."

And, thrusting his hand into Chicot's breeches, he drew out the empty purse.

"Jesus!" he murmured, "and who is to settle the score?"

This thought must have impressed the monk deeply, for he was on his legs in a moment, and, with a somewhat tipsy but rapid step, he made for the door, crossed the kitchen, refusing to enter into talk with the innkeeper, notwithstanding the latter's advances, and fled.

Then Chicot restored his money to his purse, his purse to his pocket, and leaning against the window, already touched by the sunlight, he forgot Gorenflot in a profound meditation.

However, the brother collector pursued his way, with his wallet on his shoulder, and a meditative air on his face that may have struck passers-by as an evidence of the devout workings of his mind; but it was really nothing of the sort. Gorenflot was trying to hit on one of those magnificent lies which laggard monk and soldier are equally clever in inventing, a lie always the same in texture, but embroidered according to the liar's fancy.

As soon as Brother Gorenflot got a glimpse of the convent gates they seemed to him even gloomier-looking than usual, and the presence of several monks conversing at the entrance and anxiously gazing in every direction was not calculated to ease his mind, while the bustle and excitement among them, as soon as they saw him coming out of the Rue Saint-Jacques, gave him one of the greatest frights he had ever had in his life.

"It's of me they're talking; they're pointing at me and waiting for me; they have been searching for me all night; my absence has created a scandal; I'm lost!"

His brain reeled; a wild idea of flight came into his head; but several monks were already running to meet him; they would pursue him undoubtedly. Brother Gorenflot knew his own weak points: he was not cut out for a runner; he would be overtaken, garrotted, and dragged to the convent; he might as well be resigned.

He advanced meekly, then, toward his companions, who seemed to feel a certain hesitation about speaking to him.

"Alas!" sighed Gorenflot, "they pretend not to know me; I am unto them a stumbling-block."

At length one of the monks ventured to approach and said: "Poor, dear brother!"

Gorenflot heaved a sigh and raised his eyes to heaven.

"You know the prior is waiting for you?" said another.

"Ah! great heavens!"

"Yes," added a third, "he said you were to be brought to him as soon as you entered the convent."

"The very thing I feared," commented Gorenflot.

And, more dead than alive, he entered the gate, which was shut behind him.

"Ah! it's you," cried the brother porter. "Come quick, quick; the reverend prior, Joseph Foulon, is waiting for you."

And the brother porter, taking Gorenflot's hand, led, or rather dragged him, to the prior's room.

There, too, the door was shut behind him.

Gorenflot lowered his eyes, fearing to meet the angry gaze of the abbot; he felt he was alone, abandoned by the world, and about to have an interview with his justly irritated superior.

"Ah, you are here at last," said the abbot.

"Reverend" — stammered the monk.

"What anxiety you have given me!" continued the prior.

"You are very kind, father," answered Gorenflot, astonished at the indulgent tone of his superior, which he did not expect.

"You were afraid to return after last night's scene, I suppose?"

"I confess I did not dare to do so," said the monk, a cold sweat breaking out on his forehead.

"Ah! dear brother, dear brother," said the abbot, "what you did was very imprudent, very rash."

"Let me explain, father."

"Oh, what need is there of explaining? Your sally" —

"If there is no need of explaining," said Gorenflot, "so much the better, for it would be a difficult task for me to do so."

"I can readily understand that you were carried away for a moment by your intense enthusiasm — enthusiasm is a holy sentiment, sometimes a virtue; but virtues, when exaggerated, become almost vices; the most honorable sentiments, when carried too far, are reprehensible."

"Excuse me, father," said Gorenflot, "but though you may understand, I don't, at least, fully. Of what sally are you speaking?"

"Of the one you made last night?"

"Outside the convent?" timidly inquired the monk.

"No; in the convent."

"I made a sally in the convent, did I? You are sure it was I."

"Of course it was you."

Gorenflot scratched his nose. He was beginning to understand that he and the prior were playing at cross-purposes.

"I am as good a Catholic as you, but your audacity terrified me."

"My audacity," said Gorenflot; "then I have been audacious?"

"Worse than audacious, my son; you have been rash."

"Alas! father, you must pardon the errors of a nature that is not yet sufficiently disciplined; I will try to amend."

"Yes, but meanwhile I cannot help having my fears about you and about the consequences of this outbreak."

"What!" exclaimed Gorenflot, "the thing is known outside?"

"Of course; were you not aware that your sermon was heard by more than a hundred laymen?"

"My sermon?" murmured Gorenflot, more and more astonished.

"I confess that it was fine, and that it was natural for you to have been intoxicated by the unanimous applause you received. But to go so far as to propose a procession in the streets of Paris, to offer to lead it, harness on back, helm on head and partisan on shoulder, and to summon all good Catholics to join you, — that, you must admit, was going rather far."

Gorenflot stared at the prior with eyes in which might be read every note in the gamut of wonder.

"Now," continued the prior, "there is one way of arranging everything. The religious fervor that seethes in your generous heart would do you harm in Paris, where there are so many ungodly eyes to keep a watch on you. I desire that you should expend it" —

"Where, father?" asked Gorenflot, convinced that he was going to be sent at once to the dungeon.

"In the province."

"In exile!" cried Gorenflot.

"My dear brother, something much worse may happen to you if you stay here."

"Why, what can happen to me?"

"A trial which would probably end in your perpetual imprisonment, if not in your execution."

Gorenflot turned frightfully pale. He could not see why he should suffer perpetual imprisonment and even death for getting tipsy in an inn and spending a night outside his convent.

"While, my dear brother, by submitting to temporary banishment, you not only escape danger, but you plant the flag of our faith in the province. What you have done and said last night exposes you to peril, for we are immediately under the eyes of the King and his accursed minions; but in the province you can do and say the same things with comparative safety. Start, therefore, as soon as you can, Brother Gorenflot. It may be even already too late, and the archers may have received orders to arrest you."

"Mercy on us, reverend father, what is this you are saying?" stammered the monk, shaking all over with terror, for, as the prior, whose mildness at first had delighted him, went on, he was astounded at the proportions his sin, at the worst a very venial one, assumed; "archers, you say? And what have I to do with archers?"

"You may have nothing to do with them, but they may have got something to do with you."

"But in that case some one must have informed against me."

"I am quite sure of it. Start, then; start immediately."

"Start, reverend father!" said Gorenflot, completely disheartened. "That is very easy to say; but how am I to live when I have started?"

"Oh, nothing easier. You have supported others by collecting alms until now; from this out, you will support yourself by doing the same. And then, there is no reason why you should be anxious. The principles you developed in your sermon will gain you so many followers in the province that I am quite sure you can never want for anything. Go, go, in God's name, and, above all, do not return until you are sent for."

And the prior, after tenderly embracing Brother Gorenflot, pushed him with gentleness, but with a firmness there was no resisting, to the door of the cell.

There the entire community was assembled, awaiting the exit of Brother Gorenflot.

As soon as he appeared, every one made a rush at him, and tried to touch his hands, his neck, his robe. The veneration of some went even so far that they kissed the hem of his garment.

"Adieu," said one monk, pressing him to his heart, "adieu; you are a holy man: do not forget me in your prayers."

“Bah!” said Gorenflot to himself, “I a holy man. That’s good!”

“Adieu,” said another, wringing his hand, “brave champion of the faith, adieu! Godefroi de Bouillon was of little account in comparison with you.”

“Adieu, martyr!” said a third, kissing the end of his cord; “blindness prevails among us at present, but the light will come soon.”

And, in this fashion, was Gorenflot carried from arm to arm and from kisses to kisses until he came to the gate of the street, which closed behind him as soon as he passed through it.

Gorenflot looked back at that gate with an expression it would be vain to attempt to describe, and, for some distance, walked backwards, his eyes turned on it as if he saw there the exterminating angel with the flaming sword banishing him from its precincts.

The only words that escaped him outside the gate were these:

“Devil take me if they are not all mad; or, if they are not, then, God of mercy! it is I who am!”

PART II.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT FOUND OUT HE WAS A SOMNAMBULIST, AND HIS BITTER GRIEF THEREAT.

BEFORE the day, the woful day we have now reached, when our poor monk became the victim of such unheard-of persecution, Brother Gorenflot had led a contemplative life, which is the same as saying that he went forth on his expeditions early, if he felt like breathing the fresh air; late, if he thought he should enjoy basking in the sun. As he had an abiding faith in God and the abbey kitchen, the rather mundane extras procured by him — only on very rare occasions, however — at the *Corne d'Abondance* were his solitary outside luxuries. Moreover, these extras depended pretty much on the caprices of the faithful, and the money paid for them had to be deducted from the alms collected by Brother Gorenflot at his stopping-place in the Rue Saint-Jacques. These alms reached the convent safely enough, though somewhat diminished by the amount left here and there by the good monk on the way. Of course, Chicot was a great resource, a friend who was equally fond of good feasts and of good fellows. But Chicot was very eccentric in his mode of life. Gorenflot would sometimes meet him three or four days in succession; and then, a fortnight, a month, six weeks would elapse without any sign of him; it might be that he was shut up with the King, or was attending him on some pilgrimage, or off on some expedition in furtherance of his own affairs or hobbies. Gorenflot, then, was one of those monks for whom, as for certain soldiers born in the regiment, the world begins with the superior of the house, that is to say, with the colonel of the convent, and ends when the trencher is cleared. Consequently, this soldier of the church, this child of the uniform, — if we may be permitted to apply

to him the picturesque expression which we used a short time ago in connection with the defenders of the country, — had never taken it into his head that, some time or other, he would have to plod laboriously through the country in search of adventures.

Still, if he even had some money — but the prior's answer to his demand had been plain; without any apostolic embellishment whatever, like that versicle from Saint Luke :

“ Seek and thou shalt find.”

Gorenflot, at the very thought that he should have to go so far to seek, felt tired already.

However, the principal thing was to get clear of the peril that threatened him, an unknown peril indeed, but, if the prior were to be believed, not the less imminent on that account. The poor monk was not one of those who could disguise their appearance and escape by some clever metamorphosis. He resolved, therefore, in the first place, to gain the open country. Having come to this decision, he made his way, and at a rather rapid pace, through the Porte Bordelle, and passed cautiously, making himself as small as possible, the station of the night-patrol and the guardhouse of the Swiss, afraid that those archers, about whom the abbot of Sainte Geneviève had been so entertaining, might turn out to be realities of a peculiarly grasping kind.

But once in the open air, once in the level country, when he had gone five hundred steps from the city gate, when he saw the early spring grass growing on the slope of the fosse, having pierced the already verdant turf, as if to offer a seat to the tired wayfarer, when he saw the joyous sun near the horizon, the solitude on his right and left, and the bustling city behind him, he sat down on the ditch by the roadside, rested his double chin on his big fat hand, scratched the end of his stumpy nose with the index finger, and fell into a revery attended by an accompaniment of groans.

Except that he lacked a harp, Brother Gorenflot was no bad sample of one of those Hebrews who, hanging their harps on the willow, supplied, at the time of Jerusalem's desolation, the famous versicle “ *Super flumina Babylonis;*” and the subject of numberless melancholy pictures.

Brother Gorenflot's groans were the deeper because it was now near nine, the hour when the convent dined, for the monks, being, like all persons detached from the world, nat-

urally backward in civilization, still followed, in the year of grace 1578, the custom of the good King Charles V., who used to dine at eight in the morning, after his mass.

As easy would it be to count the grains of sand raised by a tempest on the seashore as to enumerate the contradictory ideas that seethed in the brain of the famished Gorenflot.

His first idea, the one, we may as well say, he had most trouble in getting rid of, was to return to Paris, go straight to the convent, and tell the abbot he most decidedly preferred a dungeon to exile, that he would consent to submit to the discipline, the whip, the knotted whip, yea, even the *impace*, provided only his superiors pledged their honor to see to his meals, which, with his consent, might be reduced to five a day.

To this idea, an idea so tenacious that it racked the poor monk's brain for a full quarter of an hour, succeeded another a little more rational: it was to make the best of his way to the *Corne d'Abondance*, send for Chicot, if he did not find him still asleep there, explain his deplorable situation, which was entirely due to his weakness in yielding to the jester's bacchanalian temptations, and persuade his generous friend to make some alimentary provision for him.

This idea ran in his head for a whole quarter of an hour also, for he was of a judicious turn of mind, and the notion was, really, not without merit.

And, finally, came to him another idea which was not lacking in audacity: it was to take a turn round the walls of Paris, slip in through the Porte de Saint-Germain or the Tour de Nesle, and go on with his work of collecting in the city clandestinely. He knew all the good stands, the fertile corners, the little streets where certain gossiping housewives, noted for the rearing of succulent fowl, had always a dead capon for the brother collector's wallet; he saw in memory's faithful mirror a house approached by a flight of steps, where in summer were made all kinds of preserves, and this for the main purpose — at least, so Brother Gorenflot loved to fancy — of throwing into the brother collector's bag, in exchange for his paternal benediction, — at one time, a quantity of quince jelly; at another, a dozen of pickled walnuts; at another, a box of dried apples, whose mere odor would make a dead man's mouth water for something to drink. For, to be candid, Brother Gorenflot's idea mainly turned on the pleasures of the table

and the delectability of perfect repose, so that he sometimes thought, not without alarm, of those two devil's attorneys who, on the day of the last judgment, would be likely to plead against him, and whose names are Sloth and Gluttony. But, in the meantime, the worthy monk, we are bound to admit, followed, not without remorse, perhaps, the flowery path that leads to the abyss at whose bottom howl unceasingly, like Scylla and Charybdis, those two mortal sins.

Consequently, this last plan was especially attractive to him; that was the kind of life, he thought, to which he was naturally adapted. But to carry out that plan and follow that mode of life he should have to stay in Paris, and, at every step, risk encountering the archers and sergeants and the ecclesiastical authorities, the latter a sort of folk not to be trifled with by a vagabond monk.

And then, there was another difficulty: the treasurer of the convent of Sainte Geneviève was too careful an administrator to leave Paris without a brother collector; Gorenflot would run the risk, therefore, of being confronted by a colleague who would have over him the incontestable advantage of being in the lawful exercise of his functions.

The very idea made Gorenflot shudder, and, certainly, with good reason.

The monk had got this far in his monologues and his misgivings, when he caught a glimpse of a horseman galloping so fast under the Porte Bordelle that the hoof-beats of his steed made the vault shake.

This man alighted near a house at about a hundred paces from where Gorenflot was sitting; he knocked, the gate flew open, and horse and horseman vanished.

Gorenflot took particular note of the incident, because he envied the good fortune of this cavalier who had a horse and could, consequently, sell it.

But in a moment the cavalier — Gorenflot recognized him by his cloak — came out of the house, and, seeing a clump of trees at some distance and a big heap of stones in front of the clump, he went and crouched between the trees and this novel sort of bastion.

"He's lying in wait for some one, as sure as fate," murmured Gorenflot. "If I were not afraid of the archers I would go and warn them, or if I were a little braver I'd make a stand against him myself."

At this moment the man in ambush, whose eyes were fixed on the city gate, except now and then when he examined the neighborhood with evident anxiety, during one of the rapid looks he threw to his right and left at intervals perceived Gorenflot, still sitting with his chin in his hand. The sight embarrassed him. He began walking with an affected air of indifference behind the pile of stone.

"Why," said Gorenflot, "I think I should know that figure — those features — but no, it is impossible."

Scarcely had the monk finished this observation when the man, who had his back turned on him, suddenly sank down, as if the muscles of his legs had given way under him. He had just heard the echo of horses' hoofs coming through the city gate.

And, in fact, three men, two of whom seemed lackeys, with three good mules and three big portmanteaus, were advancing slowly through the *Porte Bordelle*. The man behind the stones, as soon as he perceived them, grew even smaller than before, if that were possible, and, creeping rather than walking, he gained the group of trees. He crouched down behind the thickest of them in the attitude of a hunter on the watch.

The cavalcade passed without seeing him, or, at any rate, without noticing him, while he examined them with the greatest attention:

"I have hindered the commission of a crime," said Gorenflot to himself; "and my presence on this road at this hour is clearly a manifestation of the divine will; but I hope there will be another manifestation that will show me how to get my breakfast."

The cavalcade passed, and the watcher reëntered the house.

"Good!" said Gorenflot, "this incident will surely, or I am much mistaken, bring me the godsend I have been on the look-out for. A man who watches does n't care to be seen. I have got hold of a secret, and, though it were worth only six deniers, no matter, I'll turn it to account."

And Gorenflot took his way at once to the house, but, before he reached it, he called to mind the martial appearance of the cavalier, the long rapier that flapped against his legs, and the terrible eyes that had stared at the passing cavalcade; then he said to himself:

"After all, I think I have made a mistake; a man like that is n't easily scared."

At the door Gorenflot had no longer a doubt, and it was not his nose he scratched now, but his ear.

Suddenly his face brightened up.

"An idea!" he exclaimed.

The awakening of an idea in the monk's torpid brain was so complicated an affair that he himself was astonished at its advent; but, even in that age, people were acquainted with the proverb: "Necessity is the mother of invention."

"An idea," he repeated. "ay, and an ingenious idea, too. I will say to him: 'Monsieur, every man has his own plans, desires, and hopes. I will pray for the success of your plans; give me something.' If his plans are evil, and I have no doubt they are, he will have double need of my prayers, and will, therefore, grant me an alms. And, as far as I am concerned, all I have to do is to submit the case to the first doctor I happen to meet afterward. I will ask him is it right to pray for the success of plans that are unknown to you, but which you suspect to be evil. Whatever the doctor tells me to do, I will do; consequently, he, not I, will be responsible. If I should not meet a doctor, which is quite probable, I'll abstain from praying. In the meantime, I shall have breakfasted on the alms of that evil-minded individual."

In pursuance of this resolution, Gorenflot stood close to the wall and waited.

Five minutes later, the gate opened, and man and horse appeared, the one on top of the other.

Gorenflot approached.

"Monsieur," said he, "if five *Paters* and five *Aves* for the success of your plans would be pleasing to you" —

The man turned round and faced the monk.

"Gorenflot!" he exclaimed.

"Monsieur Chicot!" cried Gorenflot, open-mouthed.

"And where the devil may you be going, comrade?" asked Chicot.

"Have n't an idea. And you?"

"Oh, it's different with me," said Chicot; "I have an idea I am going straight before me."

"Far?"

"Until I stop. But, say, comrade, since you don't know why you are here, I suspect something."

"What?"

"That you are spying on me."

"Jesus! I spying! the Lord forbid. I saw you. that's all."

"Saw what?"

"Saw you watching the passing of the mules."

"You are mad."

"But you were behind those stones, and you had your eyes open, too!"

"See here, Gorenflot, I wish to build a house outside the walls; this freestone is mine, and I wanted to be sure it was of good quality."

"Oh, that's a different thing," said the monk, who did not believe a word of Chicot's reply; "I was mistaken."

"But what are you doing yourself outside the barriers?"

"Alas! M. Chicot, I am exiled," answered Gorenflot, with an enormous sigh.

"What?" asked Chicot.

"Exiled, I tell you."

And Gorenflot, draping himself in his robe, raised his short figure to its full height and tossed his head to and fro with the imperious air of a man who, having met with a terrible catastrophe, has, therefore, a rightful claim to the sympathy of his fellows.

"My brethren," he continued, "have cast me out from their bosom; I am excommunicated, anathematized!"

"Nonsense! for what?"

"Listen, M. Chicot," said the monk, laying his hand on his heart; "you may n't believe me, but Gorenflot pledges you his solemn word he does n't know."

"Perhaps you were found prowling about last night where you ought n't, eh, comrade?"

"To joke in that way is revolting," said Gorenflot; "you know perfectly well what I did last night."

"Yes," returned Chicot, "from eight to ten, but not from ten to three."

"What do you mean by from 'ten to three'?"

"I mean you went out at ten."

"I!" exclaimed Gorenflot, staring at the Gascon with eyes that seemed bursting out of his head.

"Undoubtedly, you; and I asked you where you were going."

"Where I was going; you asked me that?"

"Yes."

"And what did I answer?"

"That you were going to preach a sermon."

"There is some truth, however, in all this," murmured Gorenflot, staggered.

"*Parbleu!* I should say there was! Yes, and you repeated a part of your sermon: it was very long."

"It was in three parts: a division recommended by Aristotle."

"And were n't there terrible things against King Henri III. in that same discourse of yours?"

"Oh, nonsense!"

"So terrible that I should not wonder if you were prosecuted for sedition."

"M. Chicot, you open my eyes. Did I seem quite awake when I was speaking to you?"

"I must say, comrade, you looked very queer: there was a fixed gaze in your eyes which frightened me. It seemed as if you were awake and yet not awake, and as if you were talking in your sleep."

"And yet I feel sure I awoke this morning in the *Corne d'Abondance*, though the very devil were to say the contrary."

"Well! what is there astonishing about that?"

"What! nothing astonishing about that and you after telling me I left the *Corne d'Abondance* at ten?"

"Yes, but you returned at three in the morning; and, to prove it, I will even tell you you left the door open, and I was nearly freezing."

"And so was I, too; I remember that."

"So you see, then!" answered Chicot.

"If what you tell me is true" —

"If what I tell you is true? Of course it is true; you go ask Maître Bonhomet."

"Maître Bonhomet?"

"Yes. It was he opened the door for you. I remember also you were so puffed up with pride on your return that I said to you: 'Fie, fie, comrade! pride does not become any man, especially if that man is a monk.'"

"And what was I proud of?"

"Of the success of your sermon and the compliments paid you by the Duc de Guise, the cardinal, and M. de Mayenne, — whom God preserve!" added the Gascon, raising his hat.

"Now all is clear to me," said Gorenflot.

"That 's fortunate ; you agree, then, you were at that meeting ? — what the mischief do you call it ? Oh, I remember, the holy Union ; yes, that is it."

Brother Gorenflot's head dropped on his breast, and he groaned.

"I am a somnambulist," said he ; "I have long suspected it."

"Somnambulist !" repeated Chicot ; "what do you mean by that ?"

"That means, M. Chicot," said the monk, "that, in my case, mind dominates matter to such a degree that, when the body sleeps, the spirit is awake, and, when the spirit gives its orders to the body, the body has to obey, though it be ever so fast asleep."

"Heyday !" exclaimed Chicot ; "why, comrade, all this smacks of sorcery ; if you are possessed, say so, frankly. A man who walks in his sleep, gesticulates in his sleep, preaches sermons in which he attacks the King, and all this in his sleep ! — *ventre de biche* ! 't is not natural. Avaunt, Beelzebub ; *rade retro, Satanas* !"

And he made his horse swerve, as if he wanted to get away from the brother.

"And so you, too, M. Chicot, forsake me. *Tu quoque, Brute*. Ah ! I should never have believed that of you," said Gorenflot, in desperation.

And the sigh the monk heaved was heart-breaking.

Chicot had compassion on this awful desperation, which was only the more terrible because it centred on one single point.

"Well, well," said he ; "what's this you have been saying ?"

"When ?"

"Just now."

"Alas ! I don't know, M. Chicot ; I am nearly crazy. What with an over-full head and an empty stomach — oh ! M. Chicot, can't you do something for me ?"

"You spoke of travelling ?"

"Yes, the reverend prior has invited me to travel."

"In what direction ?"

"In whatever direction I choose," answered the monk.

"And you are going ?"

"I don't know where." Gorenflot raised both his hands appealingly to heaven. "Ah! for God's sake!" said he, "lend me two crowns, M. Chicot, to help me on my journey."

"I will do better than that," answered Chicot.

"Ah! what will you do?"

"I am travelling, too, as I told you."

"Yes, you told me."

"Well, supposing I take you with me?"

Gorenflot looked at the Gascon distrustfully, and like a man who could not believe in such good luck.

"But on one condition: you may be as ungodly as you like, but you must be very discreet. Are you willing to accept my proposal?"

"Accept? Well, I should think so! But have we money enough to travel with?"

"Look!" said Chicot, drawing out a long purse, gracefully rounded beneath the neck.

Gorenflot jumped for joy.

"How much?" he asked.

"A hundred and fifty pistoles."

"And where are we going?"

"You shall see, comrade."

"When shall we breakfast?"

"At once."

"But what shall I ride?" asked Gorenflot, uneasily.

"Not my horse; *corbeuf*! you would kill it."

"Then what am I to do?" said Gorenflot, disappointed.

"The simplest thing in the world; you have a belly like Silenus and you have the same hankering after wine. Well, then, to complete the resemblance, I'll buy you an ass."

"You are my king, M. Chicot; you are the sun of my existence. See that the ass you purchase is robust—you are my god, M. Chicot. And now, where are we to breakfast?"

"There, *morbleu*! Look above the door and read, if you know how to read."

They were, in fact, in front of a sort of inn, and Gorenflot, following the direction of Chicot's finger, read:

"Ham, eggs, eel-pies, and white wine."

It would be difficult to describe the change that took place in Gorenflot's countenance at this sight: his face expanded,

his eyes were dilated, his mouth opened wide and disclosed a double row of white and hungry teeth. At length he raised his arms to heaven in token of his joyful gratitude, and, rocking his enormous body backward and forward, he sang the following song, for which the only excuse that could be given was the ecstasy in which he was plunged :

“ The ass, escaped from bridle rein,
At once with joy pricks up his ears ;
The wine, uncorked, with joy is fain
To pour the ruby stream that cheers.
But neither ass nor wine ’s so gay
As monk escaped from convent sway,
Who, seated in a vine-clad bower,
May safe defy the abbot’s power.”

“ Capital ! ” cried Chicot ; “ and now, dear brother, don’t lose time, but get to your breakfast at once, while I go in search of an ass for you.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT TRAVELLED ON AN ASS NAMED PANURGE AND, WHILE TRAVELLING, LEARNED MANY THINGS HE DID NOT KNOW.

WHAT rendered Chicot so careless of the needs of his own stomach, for which, fool though he was or pretended to be, he had quite as much regard as any monk in the world, was the fact that he had had a liberal breakfast at the *Corne d’Abondance* before leaving it.

And besides, great passions, as some one has said, are meat and drink to a man ; now, Chicot, at this very moment, was under the influence of a great passion.

Having seen Brother Gorenflot seated at a table in the little inn, and that he was beginning to despatch the ham and eggs, rapidly placed before him, with his usual celerity, Chicot went among the people of the neighborhood in search of an ass for his companion. He found among the peasants of Sceaux, between an ox and a horse, the peaceful animal that was the object of Gorenflot’s aspirations : it was about four years old, rather brown in color, and had a plump body, supported by four spindle-shanks. In that age, such an ass cost twenty

livres ; Chicot gave twenty-two and was blessed for his magnificent generosity.

Chicot returned with his booty, which he led into the room where the monk was eating. Gorenflot, who had managed to make away with the half of an eel-pie and his third bottle, Gorenflot, who was excited to the highest pitch of enthusiasm by the appearance of his steed, and, moreover, disposed by the fumes of a generous wine to indulge in all generous emotions, Gorenflot jumped on his ass's neck, and, after kissing both jaws, introduced between them a long crust of bread, whereat the said ass brayed with delight.

"Oh, oh!" cried Gorenflot, "there's an animal with a fine voice! we'll sing together, now and then. Thanks, friend Chicot, thanks."

And he baptized his ass on the spot by the name of Panurge.

Chicot, after casting his eye over the table, saw from its appearance there would be no tyranny in calling a halt on his companion's performance.

He said, then, in those tones which Gorenflot could never resist :

"Come, comrade, we must be off. We'll lunch at Melun."

Although Chicot spoke in his most imperative manner, the promise he had coupled with his stern order was so pleasing that Gorenflot, instead of raising any objection, simply repeated :

"At Melun! at Melun!"

And, without further delay, Gorenflot, aided by a chair, got up on the ass, whose saddle was merely a leather cushion from which hung two straps with loops at the end that did duty for stirrups. The monk inserted his sandals in these loops, seized the halter of the donkey with his right hand, planted his left firmly on the croup, and passed out of the hotel, as majestic as the god to whom Chicot, with some reason, had compared him.

As for Chicot, he bestrode his horse with the air of the consummate equestrian, and our two cavaliers trotted along on the road to Melun.

They did not stop for four leagues. Then a halt was called, of which the monk took advantage, stretched himself on the grass, and fell asleep. Chicot made a calculation : one hundred and twenty leagues, at ten leagues a day, would take twelve days.

Panurge patiently browsed a tuft of thistles.

Ten leagues was all that could be reasonably expected from the forces of a monk and an ass.

Chicot shook his head.

"It is not possible," he murmured, looking down on Gorenflot, who was sleeping on the slope of a ditch as calmly as if he were resting on the softest eider-down coverlet; "it is not possible; if this monk care to follow me, he must make at least fifteen leagues a day."

Another torture for Brother Gorenflot, who had already witnessed so many!

Chicot pushed the monk to awake him, and then communicated the result of his meditations.

Gorenflot opened his eyes.

"Are we at Melun?" he inquired, "I am hungry."

"No, comrade, not yet," said Chicot; "and that's just why I roused you. We are going too slowly, *centre de biche!* we are going too slowly."

"Eh? going too slowly?—and why should that vex you, dear Monsieur Chicot? Our life is but an uphill journey, though it ends in heaven; and all uphill journeys are tiresome. And what is the hurry? The more time we spend on the road, the longer we'll be together. Am I not travelling for the propagation of the faith, and you for your pleasure? Now it's clear the slower we go, the faster will the faith be propagated; and it's just as clear the slower we go, the better will you amuse yourself. For both these reasons, my advice would be to stop a few days at Melun; I have been told the eel-pies there are excellent, and I should like to make a conscientious and judicious comparison between the eel-pies of Melun and those of other places. What have you to say to that, M. Chicot?"

"What I have to say is that we ought not to stop at Melun for lunch at all, but push forward as fast as we can and make up for lost time by not eating until we can sup at Montereau."

Gorenflot stared at his companion vacantly.

"Come, let us get on!" said Chicot.

The monk, who had been lying his full length, with his arms crossed under his head, simply sat up and groaned.

"Oh, if you wish to remain behind, comrade," continued Chicot, "you are your own master and can travel in your own way."

"No, no," said Gorenflot, appalled at the isolation from

which he had escaped only by a miracle; "no, no, I'll follow you, M. Chicot, I love you too much to leave you."

"Then mount and let us be off, comrade."

Gorenflot planted his ass against a little mound and succeeded in getting on, not astride, as before, but sideways, after the manner of ladies; he did so, he claimed, because this position rendered conversation easier. But the monk's real reason was that he foresaw a rapid acceleration to the movement of his steed and that his new situation would give him a double fulcrum: he could hold on by both mane and tail.

Chicot set his horse to a gallop; the ass followed, braying.

Gorenflot's first moments were something terrible, fortunately, the surface of the part on which he rested was so extended that he had less difficulty than another might have in maintaining his centre of gravity.

From time to time, Chicot stood up in his stirrups, examined the road intently, and, not seeing what he looked for on the horizon, redoubled his pace.

Gorenflot had too much to do at first to keep his seat to give any attention to these signs of vigilance and impatience. But when he had gradually acquired some confidence in his ability to maintain his equilibrium and noticed that Chicot was ever and anon going through the same performance:

"Why, dear Monsieur Chicot, what in the world are you looking for?" said he.

"Nothing," answered Chicot, "I'm only looking in the direction we're going."

"But we're going to Melun, are we not? you said so yourself; you even added that" —

"We are not going, comrade, we're not getting on," said the jester, spurring his horse.

"Not getting on! we not getting on!" cried the monk; "why, we're trotting as hard as we can."

"Then, let us gallop!" said Chicot, urging his horse to that gait. Panurge, following the example, also began to gallop, but with an ill-disguised rage that boded no good to his rider.

Gorenflot was now almost suffocated.

"I say, I say, M. Chicot," he managed to shout as soon as he was able to speak, "you may call this a pleasure excursion, but I don't see where the pleasure of it is, I assure you."

"Gallop! Gallop!" answered Chicot.

"But the ascent is awfully hard."

"A good horseman gallops best when going uphill."

"Yes, but I never pretended to be a good horseman."

"Then stay behind."

"No, no, *ventrebleu!* not for all the world!"

"Then gallop, as I told you."

And Chicot flew on at a more rattling pace than ever.

"Stay! Panurge is at his last gasp!" cried Gorenflot.

"Panurge is at a standstill!"

"Then good-bye, comrade," answered Chicot.

Gorenflot had a moment's temptation to reply in corresponding fashion; but he recalled the fact that yonder horse, which he cursed from the bottom of his heart and which carried a man so crotchety, carried also the purse that was in the pocket of that man. He became resigned, and beating the donkey's side with his sandals, he forced him anew to a gallop.

"I shall kill my poor Panurge!" he cried, piteously, in hopes that though Chicot's sensibility was callous to assaults, his self-interest might prove more malleable.

"Well! kill him, comrade, kill him," Chicot answered back, unmoved by a remark that Gorenflot judged so important, and not lessening his speed in the slightest; "kill him, we'll buy a mule."

As if these threatening words had come home to him, the ass left the middle of the road and dashed into a little dry side-path on which Gorenflot himself would not have ventured to go even on foot.

"Help! help!" cried the monk, "I shall tumble off into the river."

"No danger," answered Chicot; "if you tumble into the river I'll warrant you're sure to float without any aid."

"Oh!" mumbled Gorenflot, "this will be the death of me, for sure! And to think all this has happened to me only because I am a somnambulist!"

And the monk raised an appealing look to heaven, meaning thereby:

"Lord! Lord! what crime hath thy servant committed that thou shouldst afflict him with such an infirmity?"

Suddenly Chicot, who had reached the top of the ascent, halted his horse so abruptly that the hind legs of the astonished brute bent until his crupper almost touched the ground.

Gorenflot, who was not so good a horseman as his companion, and who, besides, had to do with a halter for a bridle, Gorenflot, we repeat, continued his course.

"Stop, *corbœuf*! stop!" cried Chicot.

But the ass had got an idea into his head that he might just as well have a gallop, and asses' ideas are tenacious things.

"Stop!" cried Chicot again. "or, as sure as I am a gentleman, I'll send a bullet through your skull!"

"What a devil of a fellow!" said Gorenflot to himself. "I wonder what mad dog bit him!"

Then, Chicot's voice growing more and more menacing, and the monk believing he already heard the whistling of the bullet wherewith he was threatened, the latter executed a manœuvre which his manner of riding enabled him to go through with the greatest ease: he slipped down to the ground.

"Could n't be done better!" said he, as he bravely dropped on his centre of gravity, still holding fast with both hands to the halter of his ass, which resisted for a few steps, but ended by giving in.

Then Gorenflot looked round for Chicot, eager to detect on his countenance those marks of approbation that must surely be there at sight of a manœuvre so skilfully executed.

But Chicot was concealed behind a rock, from whence he shot forth his signals and his threats.

Such excess of wariness convinced the monk that something of moment was at hand. He looked before him and there perceived, about five hundred paces from him, three men quietly jogging along on their mules.

At the first glance he recognized the travellers who had ridden in the morning from Paris through the Porte Bordelle, the same travellers that Chicot had watched so eagerly from behind his tree.

Chicot remained in the same posture until the three travellers were out of sight. Then and then only did he rejoin his comrade, who was still seated on the spot where he had fallen and was still holding the halter of Panurge with both his hands.

"Hang it, M. Chicot," cried Gorenflot, who was beginning to be out of patience, "you must explain to me what business is this we're engaged in: a moment ago it was, Devil take the hindmost! and now it's, Don't budge an inch from where you are!"

"My good friend," said Chicot, "I only wanted to find out whether or not your donkey was a thoroughbred, or if I had not been swindled in paying twenty-two livres for it. Now that the experiment is made, I am more than satisfied."

The monk, as, of course, is understood, was not duped by any such answer, and was about to make the fact clear to his companion, but his natural laziness warned him not to get into an argument, and was, as usual, victorious.

He contented himself, then, with answering, ill-humoredly enough :

"Well, I suppose it does n't matter, but I am very tired, and very hungry also."

"Oh, don't let that trouble you," replied Chicot, with a jolly thump on the monk's shoulder ; "I am as tired and hungry as you are, and at the first hostelry we meet" —

"And then?" asked Gorenflot, a little inclined to doubt the Gascon's words after his late experience.

"And then!" said Chicot, "we 'll have a pair of fricasseed chickens with broiled ham and a jug of their best wine."

"The honest truth, now?" inquired Gorenflot; "you 're in real earnest, this time?"

"In good and sober earnest, comrade."

"Then," said the monk, rising, "let us make for this blessed hostelry as fast as we can. Come. Panurge, you 'll have your bran."

The ass's answer was a joyous bray.

Chicot got on horseback: Gorenflot led his ass by the halter.

The longed-for inn speedily heaved in sight of the travellers, just between Corbeil and Mehun; but, to the great surprise of Gorenflot, who admired from afar its alluring aspect, Chicot ordered the monk to mount his ass, and faced about to the left so as to get to the rear of the house. For that matter, a single glance was enough to bring home to Gorenflot, whose wits were brightening up wonderfully, the reason of this strange behavior: the travellers' three mules, whose tracks Chicot was observing so intently, had stopped before the door.

"And so the events of our journey and the hours for our meals are all to be regulated by these infernal travellers?" thought Gorenflot. "It's heartbreaking."

And he heaved a profound sigh.

Panurge, on his side, saw they were swerving from the direct line which all the world, including even asses, knows is

the shortest, so came to a standstill and planted himself as stiffly on his four feet as if he had determined to take root in the ground where he happened to be.

"Look!" said Gorenflot, piteously, "even my ass refuses to advance."

"Ah, he refuses to advance," answered Chicot; "wait and we'll see!"

He approached a cornel hedge and selected a rod five feet long and an inch thick; it was at once solid and flexible.

Panurge was not one of those stupid animals that pay no attention to what is passing around them, and only foresee certain events when such events are rapping them on the pate; he had watched the manoeuvre of Chicot, for whom he was doubtless beginning to feel all the respect that eminent man deserved, and, as soon as he was sure of the jester's intentions, he shook himself and put his best leg foremost.

"He's going!" cried the monk to Chicot.

"No matter," said the Gascon, "when you're travelling with a monk and a donkey, a stick always comes in handy."

And Chicot finished cutting his rod.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT TRADED HIS ASS FOR A MULE,
AND HIS MULE FOR A HORSE.

HOWEVER, the tribulations of Gorenflot were nearing their end, for this day, at least; after their roundabout course, the pair took to the highway again and stopped at a rival inn about two miles further on. Chicot hired an apartment that overlooked the road, and ordered supper to be served in his chamber; but it was easily seen that supper held but second place in the thoughts of Chicot. He gave only scanty employment to his teeth while he looked with all his eyes and listened with all his ears. He remained thus in a brown study until ten; but as he had neither seen nor heard anything, he raised the siege at ten, and directed his own horse and the monk's ass to be ready at daybreak, after they had recuperated on double rations of oats and bran.

At this order, Gorenflot, who for an hour had been appar-

ently sleeping but really only dozing, plunged in that delectable ecstasy which follows a good repast watered by a sufficient quantity of generous wine, heaved a sigh.

"At daybreak?" said he.

"Well? *ventre de biche!* man," retorted Chicot, "you ought to have got accustomed by this time to rising at that hour!"

"And pray why?" inquired Gorenflot.

"For matins."

"I had an exemption from my superior," answered the monk.

Chicot shrugged his shoulders, and the word "sluggard" died away on his lips.

"Well, yes, sluggard, if you like; why not?" said Gorenflot.

"Man was born for work," answered Chicot, sententiously.

"And the monk for repose; the monk is an exception."

And, satisfied with this reply, which seemed to touch even Chicot himself, the monk made an exit that was full of dignity, and gained his bed, which Chicot, doubtless fearing some imprudence, had ordered to be placed in his own room.

On the morning, at daybreak, if Brother Gorenflot had not been sleeping the sleep of the just, he would have seen Chicot rise, approach the window and take his stand behind the curtain.

Soon, although the hangings concealed him, Chicot drew back rapidly; if Gorenflot, instead of continuing to slumber, had been wide awake, he would have heard the tramping of three mules on the pavement.

Chicot ran up to Gorenflot and shook him by the arm until the latter opened his eyes.

"Am I never to have any rest?" he stammered, having slept a full ten hours.

"Up! up!" said the Gascon, "dress yourself, we start at once."

"But my breakfast?" asked the monk.

"You'll find it on the road to Montereau."

"What do you mean by — Montereau?" inquired the monk, who was not strong in geography.

"Montereau is the town where we're to breakfast; is not that enough for you?" answered the Gascon.

"Yes," returned Gorenflot, laconically.

"Then, comrade, I'm going down to pay the bill for ourselves

and our beasts. If you are not ready in five minutes, I 'm off without you."

A monk does not take long to make his toilet: but Gorenflot spent six minutes at it. Consequently, when he reached the door, he saw that Chicot, who was as punctual as a Swiss, had already started.

The monk, thereupon, mounted Panurge, who, excited by his double ration of oats and bran just provided for him by Chicot's orders, galloped of his own accord and quickly placed his rider by the side of the Gascon.

Chicot was standing on his stirrups; he saw the three mules and the three travellers on the horizon; they were descending a little hill.

The monk groaned at the thought that an influence utterly foreign to him should affect his fate in this fashion.

But, this time, Chicot kept his word, and they breakfasted at Montereau.

The day was much like the one before, and the next was attended by pretty much the same succession of incidents. We shall, therefore, pass rapidly over details: and, indeed, Gorenflot was growing accustomed to his checkered existence, when, towards evening, he perceived that Chicot was gradually losing all his gayety ever since noon; the latter had failed to get a glimpse of the travellers he was pursuing; so he was very ill-tempered at supper and slept badly.

Gorenflot ate and drank enough for two, sang his best songs; it was all in vain. Chicot was as dull as ever.

Hardly had the day come into existence when he was on his feet and shaking his companion; the monk dressed, and the trot with which they started soon changed to a wild gallop. But they might as well have taken it easy; no travellers in sight.

Toward noon, horse and ass were ready to drop.

Chicot went straight to the turnpike office built on the Pont Villeneuve-le-Roi for the accommodation of cloven-footed animals.

"Did you see three travellers, mounted on mules, pass this morning?" he inquired.

"This morning, monsieur," replied the turnpike keeper, "no; yesterday, no doubt I did."

"Yesterday?"

"Yes, yesterday evening, at seven."

"Did you notice them?"

"Bless my heart, monsieur! does any one ever notice travelers?"

"I only ask if you have any idea of the rank of these men."

"To my idea, they were a master and two servants."

"That's what I wanted," said Chicot; and he gave the man two crowns.

"Yesterday evening, at seven," he murmured; "*ventre de biche!* they are twelve hours ahead of me. Courage, comrade, let us push on!"

"Listen, M. Chicot," said the monk. "courage is all very well. I have a little for my own use, but none to spare for Panurge."

And, in fact, the poor animal, tired out for two whole days, was trembling in every limb, and Gorenflot was in a tremble, too, caused by the quivering of his beast's poor body.

"And look at your horse, also," continued Gorenflot; "see what a state he's in!"

It was easy enough seeing his condition; the noble animal, notwithstanding his ardor, or rather, because of his ardor, was streaming with foam, and a hot vapor issued from his nostrils, while the blood seemed ready to spurt from his eyes.

After a rapid examination of the two beasts, Chicot seemed inclined to favor his companion's opinion.

Gorenflot drew a long breath of relief.

Then Chicot said suddenly: "Can't be helped, brother collector. We must take a decisive step on the spot."

"Why, we have been doing nothing else for some days," cried Gorenflot, whose features showed his agitation, although the nature of the new proposal was utterly unknown to him.

"We must part," said Chicot, taking at once, as the phrase goes, the bull by the horns.

"Oh, nonsense," returned Gorenflot, "always the same joke. We part! and why?"

"You ride too slowly, comrade."

"*Vertudieu!*" exclaimed Gorenflot; "while I ride like the wind! We galloped five hours without stopping, this morning."

"It is n't enough."

"Then let us start again; the quicker we go, the sooner we'll arrive; for I suppose we'll arrive some time."

"My horse won't go, and your ass is n't fit for work, either."

"Then what is to be done?"

"We 'll leave them here, and pick them up when we return."

"But what about ourselves? Do you intend going the rest of the way on foot?"

"No; we 'll get mules."

"How?"

"Buy them."

"Well, well!" said Gorenflot, with a sigh, "another sacrifice."

"So then?"

"All right, bring on your mule."

"Bravo, comrade; why, you're getting on. Commend Boyard and Panurge to the care of the innkeeper, and I leave you and go to buy the mules."

Gorenflot fulfilled conscientiously the mission wherewith he was charged; during his four days' connection with Panurge he had gained a keener appreciation of his faults than of his virtues, and had noticed that his three predominant faults were the faults to which he himself inclined: sloth, gluttony, luxury. Their kindred failings were, however, a bond of sympathy, and Gorenflot parted from his ass with regret; but Gorenflot was not only slothful, gluttonous, and luxurious, he was also selfish, and he preferred parting from Panurge to parting from Chicot, for, as we have already indicated, Chicot carried the purse.

Chicot returned with two mules, on which they made twenty leagues that day; and so, on that very evening, Chicot had the satisfaction of seeing the three mules standing before a farrier's door.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, for the first time drawing a breath of relief.

"Ah!" sighed the monk, in turn.

But the Gascon's trained eye could distinguish neither the harness of the mules nor the owner and his servants; the mules were reduced to their natural ornament, by which we mean they were completely naked; as for the master and his servants, they had vanished.

Still more: about these animals were people unknown to Chicot, who were evidently examining and appraising them: a horsedealer, the farrier, and two Franciscans; they turned the mules round and round, looked at their teeth, eyes, ears; in a word, they were testing them.

Chicot trembled in every one of his members.

"You go forward," said he to Gorenflot, "join the Franciscans, draw them aside, and question them; you monks keep, I imagine, no secrets from one another: get them to tell you who were the owners of the mules, their price, and what has become of their former masters; then return with your information."

Gorenflot, uneasy at his friend's uneasiness, trotted off and soon returned.

"I have the whole story," said he. "And first, do you know where we are?"

"Oh, *morbleu!* we're on the road to Lyons," said Chicot; "that's the only thing I care to know."

"Indeed! well, you may care to know something more; at least, I should gather from what you have been telling me that you wanted to know what has become of the mules' owners."

"Yes, go on."

"The one who seems to be a gentleman" —

"Good!"

"The one who seems to be a gentleman has taken the road by Château-Chinon and Privas, a short cut to Avignon, apparently."

"Alone?"

"Alone? how?"

"I ask you has he taken this road alone?"

"With a lackey."

"And the other lackey?"

"Continued on the road to Lyons."

"Who'd have thought it! And why is the gentleman going to Avignon? I fancied he was going to Rome. But," continued Chicot, as if speaking to himself, "I am asking you about matters of which you can know nothing."

"Really, now?" answered Gorenflot; "and suppose I do know something of them? Ah! that astonishes you, does it?"

"What do you know?"

"He is going to Avignon because our Holy Father Pope Gregory XIII. has sent a legate plenipotentiary to Avignon."

"Good," said Chicot, "I understand — and the mules?"

"The mules were tired out; they sold them to a horse-dealer, who wants to sell them again to the Franciscans."

"For how much?"

"Fifteen pistoles apiece."

"Then how were they able to continue their journey?"

"On horses which they purchased."

"From whom?"

"A captain of reiters stationed here to buy fresh horses."

"*Ventre de biche*, comrade," cried Chicot, "you're a wonder, and I never appreciated you until to-day!"

Gorenflot strutted like a peacock.

"Now," said Chicot, "finish what you have so well begun."

"What am I to do?"

Chicot jumped off and flung the bridle on the arm of the monk.

"Take the two mules and offer them to the Franciscans for twenty pistoles; they will give you the preference, surely."

"If they don't," said Gorenflot, "I'll denounce them to their superior."

"Bravo, comrade, you *are* getting on."

"But," inquired Gorenflot, "how are we to continue our journey?"

"On horseback, *morbleu*, on horseback!"

"You don't say so!" cried the monk, scratching his ear.

"You afraid? a cavalier like you? nonsense!" said Chicot.

"Bah!" answered Gorenflot, "I'll risk it! But where shall I find you again?"

"On the Place de la Ville."

"Then go there and wait for me."

And the monk advanced resolutely toward the Franciscans, while Chicot made his way to the chief square of the little town, by a cross-street.

There he found the captain of reiters at the inn known as the Coq-Hardi; he was quaffing a rather nice little wine of Auxerre, which second-class amateurs often mistake for Burgundy; the Gascon got further information from him which confirmed that which he had received from Gorenflot in every particular.

In a moment he bargained for two horses which figured on the honest reiter's report book as having *died on the route*: thanks to this accident, he had to pay only thirty-five pistoles for them.

They were discussing the price of the saddles and bridles when Chicot saw the monk coming through a little side street with two saddles on his head and two bridles in his hands.

"Oho! what does this mean, comrade?" said he.

"Why," answered Gorenflot, "these are the saddles and bridles of our mules."

"So you kept a grip on them, you rogue?" said Chicot, with his broad smile.

"Indeed I did," answered the monk.

"And you sold the mules?"

"For ten pistoles apiece."

"Which they paid?"

"Here's the money."

And Gorenflot slapped his pockets, full of all sorts of coins.

"*Ventre de biche!*" cried Chicot, "you are a great man, comrade."

"I am what I am," answered Gorenflot, with modest pride.

"And now to work," said Chicot.

"Ah! but I'm so thirsty!" said the monk.

"Well, drink while I am saddling the horses, but not too much."

"Just one bottle."

"Oh, I don't mind a bottle."

Gorenflot drank two, and returned to restore the remainder of the money to Chicot.

Chicot for a moment entertained the notion of letting the monk keep the twenty pistoles, diminished by the price of the two bottles; but he reflected that on the day Gorenflot came into possession of even two crowns he would lose all control over him.

He took the money, then, without the monk even noticing he had hesitated, and got on horseback.

The monk did the same, with the assistance of the captain of reiters, a man who feared God, and who, in exchange for his services in holding Gorenflot's foot while the latter mounted, received the monk's benediction.

"Could n't be better," said Chicot, as he set his horse to a gallop; "that blade got a blessing for which he should bless his stars."

Gorenflot, seeing his supper running before him, kept up with Chicot; moreover, his equestrian progress was rapid: instead of clutching the mane with one hand and the tail with the other, he now grasped the pommel of the saddle with both hands, and with that single support, went as fast as Chicot could well desire.

In the end he showed more activity than Chicot himself, for whenever his patron changed the gait and moderated the pace of his horse, the monk, who preferred galloping to trotting, kept up the same rattling pace, shouting hurrahs at his steed.

Such noble efforts deserved a reward: the next evening, a little this side of Chalons, Chicot came up with Maître Nicolas David, still disguised as a lackey, and did not lose sight of him until both reached Lyons, through whose gates the entire three passed on the evening of the eighth day after their departure from Paris.

This occurred at the very moment almost when Bussy, Saint-Luc, and his wife arrived, as we have already said, from an opposite direction, at the Castle of Méridor.

CHAPTER XXX.

HOW CHICOT AND HIS COMPANION BECAME GUESTS AT THE
CYGNE DE LA CROIX, AND HOW THEIR HOST RECEIVED
THEM.

MAÎTRE NICOLAS DAVID, still disguised as a lackey, made his way to the Place des Terreaux and selected the principal hostelry in the square, which was known as the Cygne de la Croix.

Chicot saw him enter and watched until he was sure he was received in the hostelry and would not leave it.

"Have you any objection to the Cygne de la Croix?" said the Gascon to his travelling companion.

"Not the slightest," was the answer.

"You will go in, then, and bargain for a private and retired room; you will say you are expecting your brother; then you will wait for me at the door; meanwhile, I shall take a walk and return at nightfall; when I do, I expect to find you at your post, and, as you have been acting as sentry and must know the plan of the house, you will conduct me to my chamber without exposing me to the danger of meeting people I don't wish to see. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," answered Gorenflot.

"The chamber you select must be spacious, cheerful, easy

of access, and, if possible, next to that of the traveller who has just arrived. Try also to get one with windows looking on the street, so that I may see every one who enters or goes out; do not mention my name on any account, and you can promise mountains of gold to the cook."

Gorenflot fulfilled his commission to perfection. After the apartment was chosen, night came on, and, after night came on, Gorenflot took his companion by the hand and led him to the room in question. The monk, who, foolish as nature had made him, had some of the churchman's craft, called Chicot's attention to the fact that their room, although situated on another landing, was next to that occupied by Nicolas David, and was separated from it only by a partition, partly of wood and partly of lime, which could be easily bored through by any one who wished.

Chicot listened to the monk with the greatest attention, and any one who had heard the speaker and seen his hearer would have been able to see how the face of the latter brightened at the words of the former.

Then, when Gorenflot had finished :

"What you have just told me deserves a reward," said Chicot; "you shall have sherry for supper to-night, Gorenflot. Yes, *morbleu!* you shall, or I am not your comrade."

"I never got tipsy on that wine," said Gorenflot, "it ought to be pleasant."

"*Ventre de biche!*" answered Chicot, "you'll know it in two hours, you may take my word for it."

Chicot sent for the host.

It may be thought strange, perhaps, that the teller of this story should introduce so many of his characters into so many hostelries: to this he can only reply that it is not his fault if his characters, some in obedience to the wishes of their mistresses, others to avoid the anger of the King, have to travel north or south, as the case may be. Now, placed as the author is between antiquity, when people, owing to the existence of a spirit of fraternal hospitality, could do without inns, and modern life, in which the inn has been transformed into an ordinary, he is forced to stop in hostelries, since all the important scenes in his book have to take place therein. Moreover, the caravansaries of the Occident had at this period a triple form which offers considerable interest and which almost no longer exists. This triple form was the inn, the hostelry, and

the tavern. Note that we do not speak here of those agreeable bathing-houses which have no counterpart at the present day, and which, being legacies bequeathed by the Rome of the emperors to the Paris of our kings, borrowed from antiquity the manifold pleasures of its profane license.

But these latter establishments were still enclosed within the walls of the capital; under the reign of King Henri III. the province had still only its hostelry, its inn, and its tavern.

Well, then, we are in a hostelry, a fact of which the host was proudly conscious, as was proved by his reply to Chicot's request for his presence that his guest must have patience, since he was talking with a traveller who, having arrived before him, had a right to prior service.

Chicot guessed that this traveller was his lawyer.

"What can they be talking about?" asked Chicot.

"You think, then, that our host and your friend are in collusion?"

"Zounds, man, you see it yourself! since the fellow with the malapert face which we got a glimpse of and which, I hope, no doubt belongs to" —

"Our host," said the monk.

"Is holding a conference with another fellow dressed as a lackey."

"But," said Gorenflot, "he has changed his clothes — I noticed that — he is now entirely dressed in black."

"That settles it! the host is engaged in some plot or other, there's not a doubt of it."

"Shall I try to confess his wife?" asked Gorenflot.

"No," said Chicot, "you had better go and take a stroll through the city."

"But my supper?"

"I'll see it is got ready during your absence. Stay, here's a crown to enable you to get into proper trim for it."

Gorenflot accepted the crown gratefully.

During his travels, the monk had more than once taken a solitary ramble in the evening, a sort of half nocturnal promenade of which he was passionately fond; even in Paris he used to venture on a tramp of this sort, his office of brother collector giving him a certain amount of freedom. But these rambles were dearer than ever to him since he left the convent. Gorenflot's love of freedom now breathed through every pore, and he only remembered his former abode as a prison.

So, with his robe tucked up and his crown in his pocket, he set out on his explorations.

No sooner was he outside the room than Chicot took a gimlet immediately, and bored a hole through the partition, on a level with his eye.

This hole, not as large as that in a pea-shooter, did not allow him, on account of the thickness of the boards, to get a distinct view of the different parts of the room; but, by gluing his ear to it, he could hear the voices easily enough.

However, thanks to his host's position in the apartment, Chicot could see him plainly as he talked with Nicolas David.

Some words escaped him, but those he did catch proved that David was making a great display of his fidelity to the King, speaking even of a mission confided to him by M. de Morvilliers.

While he was discoursing, the host listened respectfully, but with this respect was mingled a good deal of indifference, to say the very least of it. His answers were few and short, and Chicot noticed the irony in his eyes and in his tones every time he pronounced the King's name.

"Aha!" said Chicot to himself, "would our host be a Leaguer, peradventure? *Mordieu!* I'll make sure of that."

And as the conversation in Maitre Nicolas' room did not promise anything further of importance, Chicot resolved to wait patiently for his host's visit to himself.

At last the door opened.

The host entered, hat in hand, but with the same jeering expression that had struck Chicot when he saw him talking with the lawyer.

"Be seated, my dear monsieur," said Chicot, "and before we come to any definite arrangement, be pleased to hear my story."

The host seemed anything but pleased with this exordium, and even made a sign with his head that he preferred standing.

"I wish you to feel entirely at your ease, my dear monsieur," resumed Chicot.

The host made a sign that intimated he was in the habit of taking his ease without the permission of anybody.

"You saw me this morning with a monk?" continued Chicot.

"Yes, monsieur," answered the host.

"Hush! we must be careful — this monk is proscribed."

"Pshaw!" returned the host, "I suppose some Huguenot in disguise."

Chicot assumed an air of offended dignity.

"Huguenot!" he said, disgusted, "pray who spoke of a Huguenot? I'd have you know this monk is one of my relatives, and there are no Huguenots among my relatives. Shame! shame! an honest man like you ought to blush at the very thought of uttering the name of such vermin."

"But, monsieur, such things have occurred," retorted the other.

"Never in my family! On the contrary, that monk is the most furious enemy ever let loose on the Huguenots, and so he has fallen into disgrace with his Majesty King Henri III., who, as you know, protects them."

The host seemed at length interested in the persecution of Gorenflot.

"Hush!" said he, laying a finger on his lip.

"What do you mean?" asked Chicot; "surely you have n't any of the King's people here?"

"I am afraid I have," said the host, shaking his head; "there, on that side, is a traveller"—

"Then my relative and I must escape at once, for an outlaw, a fugitive"—

"Where could you go?"

"We have two or three addresses given us by one of our friends, an innkeeper named La Hurière."

"La Hurière! Do you know La Hurière?"

"Hush! 't is a name not to be spoken; we made his acquaintance on the evening of St. Bartholomew."

"Then," said the host, "I see that you and your relative are holy people. I am also acquainted with La Hurière. I was even desirous when I bought this hostelry of adopting the same sign as his, the Belle-Étoile, as a testimony of my friendship for him; but the hostelry had long been known as the Cygne de la Croix, and I was afraid a change might not work well. So you say that your relative, monsieur"—

"Was so imprudent as to preach against the Huguenots; he was extraordinarily successful, and so his Most Christian Majesty, furious at the success that disclosed the real opinions of the people, wanted to put him in prison."

"And then?" inquired the innkeeper, in a tone that showed there could be no mistake about his feelings.

"Faith, I carried him off," said Chicot.

"And you did right. The poor dear man!"

"M. de Guise, however, promised me that he would protect him."

"What! the great Henri de Guise? Henry the" —

"Henri the saint."

"Yes, you are right, Henri the saint."

"But I was afraid of civil war."

"Then," said the host, "if you are a friend of M. de Guise, you know this."

And the innkeeper made a sort of masonic sign by which the Leaguers knew one another.

"Faith, I should say I did! And you know this, don't you?"

Chicot, during the famous night he had passed in the convent, had not only noticed, a score of times, the sign made by the innkeeper, but the corresponding sign also.

So Chicot, in his turn, made the second sign.

"Then," said the host, all his suspicions scattered to the wind, "you must consider yourself at home, my house is yours; look on me as a friend, for I look on you as a brother, and if you have no money" —

Chicot's answer was to draw from his pocket a purse that, although already a little depleted, had still all the outward show of a dignified corpulence.

The sight of a chubby-looking purse is always pleasing, even to the generous man who offers you money and in this way learns that you have no need of it: he can keep the merit of his offer without being compelled to put it into execution.

"Oh, just as you like," said the host.

"I may as well tell you," added Chicot, "so that you may be quite easy in your mind, that we are travelling for the propagation of the faith, and that our expenses are paid by the treasurer of the holy Union. Be so kind, then, as to point out a hostelry where we may be perfectly safe."

"*Morbleu!*" said the innkeeper, "I know of no place as safe as where you are; you can take my word for that."

"But you spoke just now of a man staying in the next room to me."

"Yes, but let him take care; let him make the slightest attempt to spy on you, and out he goes, neck and crop, or Bernouillet is a liar."

"Your name is Bernouillet?" asked Chicot.

"That is my name, monsieur; not known, I suppose, in the capital, but pretty well known among the faithful in the province. I am proud to say. Give but the word, and I'll turn him adrift at once."

"Why should you?" said Chicot; "on the contrary, let him stay; it's always better to have your enemies under your hand; you can watch them, at least."

"You are right," said Bernouillet, admiringly.

"But what makes you believe this man is our enemy? I say *our* enemy," said the Gascon, with a tender smile, "because I see clearly we are brothers."

"Yes, certainly we are," returned the host. "What makes me believe"—

"That is what I am asking you."

"Well! he came disguised as a lackey, then he just put on a lawyer's dress; and I am sure he is no more a lawyer than he is a lackey, for I saw the long point of a rapier under his cloak. Besides, he spoke of the King in a way that nobody speaks of him; and he confessed to me he had a mission from M. de Morvilliers, who, you know, is a minister of Nebuchadnezzar."

"Say rather of Herod."

"Of Sardanapalus!"

"Bravo!"

"Ah! I see we understand each other," said the host.

"I should think so!" returned Chicot; "so I remain?"

"I'll be bound you do!"

"But not a word about my relative."

"You may depend on that."

"Nor about me."

"What do you take me for? But silence! Some one is coming."

Gorenflot stood on the threshold.

"Himself!—the worthy man himself!" cried the host.

And he went up to Gorenflot and made the sign of the Leaguers.

This sign struck Gorenflot with surprise and dismay.

"Answer, answer, brother," said Chicot, "our host knows everything, he is a member."

"Member!" repeated Gorenflot, "member of what?"

"Of the holy Union," said Bernouillet, in almost a whisper.

"You see now you may answer his sign; answer it, then."

Gorenflot made the answering sign, and the innkeeper's joy was complete.

"But," said Gorenflot, who was in a hurry to change the conversation, "I was promised sherry."

"Sherry, Malaga, Alicant, all the wines in my cellar are at your service, brother."

Gorenflot's eyes wandered from the innkeeper to Chicot and were then raised to heaven. He had not the slightest notion why such luck befell him, and it was evident he was acknowledging, with true Christian humility, that his good fortune surpassed his merits.

The three following days, Gorenflot got tipsy: the first day on sherry, the second on Malaga, the third on Alicant; however, after all his experiments, he confessed that there was nothing like Burgundy, and so he went back to Chambertin.

During all the time devoted by Gorenflot to these vinous verifications, Chicot never left his room, and kept on watching the lawyer Nicolas David from night till morning.

The innkeeper, who attributed Chicot's seclusion to his fear of the pretended royalist, did his best to satisfy his vindictive feelings by playing every sort of trick on the latter.

But all this had very little effect, at least apparently. Nicolas David, having made an appointment to meet Pierre de Gondy at the hostelry of the *Cygne de la Croix*, would not leave his temporary domicile, dreading he might miss the Guises' messengers if he went elsewhere, and so, in his host's presence, nothing seemed to ruffle him. However, when the door closed on Maître Bernouillet, his solitary rage was a diverting spectacle for Chicot, who had his eye always on the gimlet-hole.

David had divined the innkeeper's antipathy toward him on the second day of his residence, and had said, shaking his fist at him, or rather, at the door through which he passed out:

"In five or six days, you scoundrel, you shall pay me for this."

Chicot knew enough now to satisfy him; he was sure the lawyer would not leave the hostelry before he received the legate's answer.

But as this sixth day — the seventh since his arrival at the inn — drew nigh, Nicolas David, who had been told repeatedly by the innkeeper, in spite of Chicot's remonstrances, that his room was badly needed, Nicolas David, we say, fell sick.

Then the innkeeper insisted he should leave while he was

still able to walk. The lawyer asked a day's respite, declaring he would certainly be well the next day. But on the next day he was worse than ever.

The host himself came with this news to his friend the Leagner.

"Aha!" said he, rubbing his hands, "our royalist, Herod's own friend, is going to be passed in review by the Admiral¹ — *rub-a-dub, dub, dub, rub-a-dub!*"

Now, *to be passed in review by the Admiral* meant, among the Leaguers, to make one single stride from this world to the next.

"Pshaw!" returned Chicot, "you don't believe he is dying?"

"A terrible fever, my dear brother, tertian fever, quartan fever, with paroxysms that make him bound up and down in his bed; a perfect demon, he tried to strangle me and beats my servants; the doctors can make nothing of the case."

Chicot reflected.

"You saw him, then?" he inquired.

"Of course! have n't I told you he tried to strangle me?"

"How was he?"

"Pale, nervous, shattered, shouting like one possessed."

"What did he shout?"

"Take care of the King. They want to murder the King."

"The wretch!"

"The scoundrel! sometimes he says he expects a man from Avignon and wishes to see this man before he dies."

"What's that you say?" returned Chicot. "He speaks of Avignon, does he?"

"Every minute."

"*Ventre de biche!*" said Chicot, letting fly his favorite oath.

"But don't you think," resumed the innkeeper, "it would be rather odd should he die here?"

"Very odd, indeed," said Chicot, "but I should not wish him to die before the arrival of the man from Avignon."

"Why? the sooner he dies, the sooner we're rid of him."

"Yes, but I do not push my hatred so far as to wish the destruction of both body and soul; and since this man is coming from Avignon to hear his confession" —

"Oh, nonsense! It's only some feverish delusion, some fancy for which his disease is responsible; you may be sure nobody is coming."

¹ An allusion to the death of Coligny, the chief of the Huguenots.

"But you see we can't tell," said Chicot.

"Ah! you are the right stamp of a Christian, you are!" answered the innkeeper.

"Render good for evil," says the divine law.

Chicot's host retired, filled with wonder and admiration.

As for Gorenflot, who was left totally in the dark as to all these weighty concerns, he grew visibly fatter and fatter; at the end of the week the staircase that led to his bedchamber groaned under his weight and was beginning to hem him in between the banister and the wall, so that one evening he came in terrible agitation to announce to Chicot that the staircase was narrowing. However, neither David, nor the League, nor the deplorable condition into which religion had fallen troubled him. His sole and only care was to vary his bill of fare and harmonize the different wines of Burgundy with the different dishes he ordered. No wonder the astounded innkeeper muttered every time he saw him come in and go out:

"And to think that that corpulent father should be a regular torrent of eloquence!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

HOW THE MONK CONFESSED THE LAWYER, AND THE LAWYER CONFESSED THE MONK.

AT length the day that was to rid the hostelry of its guest arrived or appeared to arrive. Maître Bernouillet dashed into Chicot's room, laughing so immoderately that the Gascon had to wait some time before learning the cause of this hilarity.

"He's dying!" cried the charitable innkeeper, "he'll soon be as dead as a door-nail, at last!"

"So that is why you are in such a fit of merriment?" asked Chicot.

"Not a doubt of it. Why, the trick would make a dog laugh."

"What trick?"

"Oh, now, that won't do. Confess that it was you yourself, my fine gentleman, that played it."

"I played a trick on the sick man?"

"Yes!"

"What is all this about? What has happened to him?"

"What has happened to him! You know he was always screaming for his man from Avignon!"

"Oho! so the man has come at last?"

"He has come."

"You have seen him?"

"Certainly. Do you think any one enters here whom I do not see?"

"And what did he look like?"

"The man from Avignon? oh, little, thin, and rosy."

"It's the same!" escaped from Chicot, inadvertently.

"There! now you must admit you sent the man to him, since you recognize the man."

"So the messenger has arrived!" cried Chicot, rising and twisting his mustache; "*centre de biche!* tell me all about it, my dear Bernouillet."

"All's easily told, and if it was n't you that did the trick, you will, perhaps, say who it was. Well, then, an hour ago, as I was hanging up a rabbit, a little man and a big horse halted before the door.

"Is Maître Nicolas here?" inquired the little man. You know that was the name that rascally royalist entered on my books.

"Yes, monsieur," I answered.

"Tell him the person he is expecting from Avignon is here."

"With pleasure, monsieur, but it is my duty to warn you."

"Of what?"

"That Maître Nicolas, as you call him, is dying."

"The more reason why you should do my bidding without any delay."

"But you do not know, perhaps, that he is dying of a malignant fever."

"Indeed?" said the man; "then there is still greater need for you to hurry?"

"What! you persist?"

"Yes."

"In spite of the danger?"

"In spite of everything. I tell you I must see him."

"The little man was getting angry and spoke in an imperious tone that admitted of no reply.

"Consequently I led him to the chamber of the dying man."

"Then he is there," said Chicot, pointing in the direction of the chamber.

"He is there; is it not funny?"

"Exceedingly funny," answered Chicot.

"How unfortunate that we can't hear them!"

"Yes, it is unfortunate."

"The scene must be quite comical."

"Comical to the highest degree; but what hinders you from entering?"

"He dismissed me."

"Under what pretext?"

"He said he was going to confess."

"What hinders you from listening at the door?"

"You're right," said the innkeeper, darting out of the room. Chicot at once ran to his hole.

Pierre de Gondy sat by the sick man's pillow, but they spoke so low that he could not hear a single word of their conversation.

Moreover, even had he heard this conversation, now drawing to its close, he would have learned little. At the end of five minutes M. de Gondy rose, took leave of the dying man, and retired.

Chicot ran to the window. A lackey, mounted on a cropeared horse, held the bridle of the big charger of which Bernouillet had spoken; a moment later the Guise's ambassador made his appearance, leaped into the saddle, and turned the corner of the street, which led into the Rue de Paris.

"*Mordieu!*" said Chicot, "I hope he has n't taken the genealogy along with him; in any case, I'll come up with him, though I have to kill half a score of horses in order to do so."

"But no," said he, "these lawyers are cunning as foxes, mine particularly, and I suspect — Where in the devil, I wonder," continued Chicot, stamping the floor impatiently and evidently having got hold of another idea connected with the first one, "where in the devil is that rascal Gorenflot?"

At this moment the innkeeper returned.

"Well?" asked Chicot.

"He is gone," said his host.

"The confessor?"

"As much a confessor as I am."

"And the sick man?"

"Fainted, I understand, after the conference."

"You're quite sure he's still in his room?"

"What a question! he'll probably never leave it except for the cemetery."

"Very well, that is all I wanted: please send me my relative as soon as he comes in."

"Even if he is tipsy?"

"No matter how he is."

"The case is then urgent?"

"Yes, the good of the cause is at stake."

Bernouillet hurried out immediately; he was a man of zeal.

It was now Chicot's turn to have a fever: he was undecided whether he should run after Gondy or force himself on David. If the lawyer was as ill as the innkeeper claimed, it was probable he had given all his despatches to M. de Gondy. Chicot stalked up and down his room like a madman, striking his forehead and trying to find an idea among the millions of globules bubbling in his brain.

He could hear nothing in the next chamber, and all he could see was a corner of the bedstead enveloped in its curtains.

Suddenly a voice resounded on the staircase. Chicot started; it was that of the monk.

Gorenflot, pushed along by the innkeeper, who was making vain efforts to keep him silent, was mounting the stairs, step by step, and singing in a tipsy voice:

"Wine, Wine
And Sorrow combine
To muddle and rattle this poor head of mine.
And then they've a tussle,
And wrestle, and hustle
To stay in the fort that the pair have assailed.
But which is the stronger
I cannot doubt longer.
For Sorrow to keep her position has failed,
Which she's forced to resign
To Wine, Wine!"

Chicot ran to the door.

"Silence, drunkard!" he shouted.

"Drunkard!" stammered Gorenflot, "well, yes, I have drunk!"

"Come here, I say: and you, Bernouillet, know what you're to do."

"Yes," said the innkeeper, making a sign of intelligence and descending the stairs four steps at a time.

"Come here, I say," continued Chicot, dragging the monk into the room, "and let us talk seriously, that is, if talk seriously you can."

"*Parbleu!* you must be joking, comrade," said Gorenflot. "I am as serious as an ass is when he's drinking."

"Or when he's drunk," retorted Chicot, with a shrug.

Then he led him to a chair, into which the monk dropped with an "ah!" expressive of the most intense relief.

Chicot shut the door and came back to Gorenflot with a face so grave that the latter understood he should have to listen.

"Well, now, what *more* have you against me?" said the monk, with an emphasis on *more* that was eloquent as to all the persecutions Chicot had made him endure.

"There is this more," answered Chicot, roughly, "that you do not think sufficiently of the duties of your profession; you wallow in drunkenness and gluttony and let religion take care of itself, *corbeauf!*"

Gorenflot turned his big eyes on his censor in amazement.

"I?" said he.

"Yes, you; look at yourself, you're a disgrace to be seen. Your robe is torn, and you must have fought on the way, for there's a black ring round your left eye."

"I?" repeated Gorenflot, more and more astonished at being lectured in a style to which, certainly, Chicot had not hitherto accustomed him.

"Of course, I mean you; you have mud above your knees, and what mud! white mud, which proves you got tipsy in the suburbs."

"Faith, I'm afraid it's all true," said Gorenflot.

"Unhappy man! a Genevièvan monk! why, even in a Franciscan it would be horrible!"

"Chicot, my friend, I must, then, be very guilty!" said Gorenflot, with deep feeling.

"So guilty that you deserve to be burnt in hell's fire down to your very sandals. Beware! if this continue, I'll have nothing more to do with you."

"Ah! Chicot, my friend, you would never do that," said the monk.

"Would n't I, though? and, besides, there are archers in Lyons."

"Oh! my beloved protector, spare me!" stammered the monk, who not only wept, but roared in his agony like a bull.

"Faugh! what a disgusting animal you are become, and that, too, at the very moment our neighbor is dying! Was this the time, I ask you, to misbehave as you have done?"

"True, true," answered Gorenflot, with an air of the deepest contrition.

"Come, let us see, are you a Christian? — yes or no!"

"Am I a Christian?" cried Gorenflot, rising, "am I a Christian? I am, and ready to proclaim my faith, though you stretch me on the gridiron of St. Lawrence!"

And with arm uplifted as if in the act of swearing, he began to sing in a voice that shook the windows:

"I am a Christian man,
Deny it no one can."

"Stop, stop," said Chicot, placing his hand over the monk's mouth. "Then, if you are, you ought not to let your brother die without confession."

"You are right; where is my brother? I'll confess him at once," said Gorenflot, "that is, when I have had a drink, for I am dying of thirst."

Chicot passed him a jug of water, which he nearly emptied.

"Ah! my son," said he, as he laid the jug on the table, "things are beginning to look clearer to me."

"That's very fortunate," answered Chicot, who determined to profit by this lucid interval.

"And now, my tender friend," continued the monk, "whom am I to confess?"

"Our unhappy neighbor, who is dying."

"They ought to give him a pint of wine with honey in it," said Gorenflot.

"You may be right, but he has more need of spiritual than of temporal succor at present, and that you must procure for him."

"Do you think I am in a fit state myself to do so, M. Chicot?" inquired the monk, timidly.

"You! I never saw you so full of unction in my life. You will lead him back to the right road if he has strayed from it, and if he is looking for it you will send him straight to Paradise."

"I'm off, then, immediately."

"Wait. I want to point out to you the course you're to follow."

"Why so? I ought to know my business after being twenty years a monk."

"Yes, but, to-day, you have not only to do your business but my will."

"Your will?"

"And if you execute it practically — are you listening? — I will deposit a hundred pistoles at the *Corne d'Abondance*, to be spent in eating or drinking, just as you choose."

"To be spent in eating *and* drinking; I like that better."

"That's your look-out — a hundred pistoles for confessing this worthy man who is dying, do you understand?"

"I'll confess him, plague take me if I don't! How am I to set about it?"

"Listen: your robe gives you great authority; you must speak in the name of God and of the King, and, by your eloquent exhortations compel this man to give up the papers that were lately brought to him from Avignon."

"And why am I to compel him to give me up these papers?"

Chicot looked at the monk pityingly.

"To gain a thousand livres, you double-dyed idiot," said he.

"All right," returned Gorenflot, "I'll go to him."

"Stop. He will tell you he has just made his confession."

"But, if he has confessed already" —

"You'll tell him he lies, that the man who left him was not a confessor, but an intriguer like himself."

"But he'll get angry."

"What need you care, since he's dying?"

"Right again."

"Now you understand, don't you? Speak of God, speak of the devil, speak of anything you like; but, however you go about it, make sure you get the papers out of his clutches."

"And if he refuse to surrender them?"

"Refuse him absolution, curse him, anathematize him."

"Or shall I take them by force?"

"Oh, any way you like. But, let us see, have you sobered up enough to execute my instructions?"

"You'll see. They shall be executed to the letter."

And Gorenflot, as he passed his hand over his broad face, apparently wiped away all surface traces of his late intoxica-

tion: his eyes became calm, although, to those who examined them keenly, they had still a besotted look; he articulated his words with more or less distinctness; and his gestures were made with a certain degree of steadiness, interrupted by an occasional tremble.

After he had spoken, he marched to the door with great solemnity.

"A moment," said Chicot: "when he gives you the papers, secure them with one hand and rap on the wall with the other."

"And if he refuse them?"

"All the same, rap."

"So in either case I am to rap?"

"Yes."

"I understand."

And Gorenflot passed out of the room, while Chicot, whose emotion was now uncontrollable, glued his ear to the wall, anxious to catch the faintest sound.

Ten minutes later the groaning of the floor in his neighbor's room announced that Gorenflot had entered, and the Gascon was soon enabled to get a glimpse of him in the narrow circle embraced by his visual ray.

The lawyer rose up in his bed and looked with wonder at his strange visitor.

"Ah! good-day, my dear brother," said Gorenflot, halting in the middle of the room, and balancing his broad shoulders.

"What brings you here, father?" murmured the sick man, in a feeble voice.

"My son, I am an unworthy monk; I have been told you are in danger, and I have come to speak to you of your soul."

"Thanks," said the invalid, "but I do not believe your care is needed. I feel a little better."

Gorenflot shook his head.

"You think so?" said he.

"I am sure of it."

"One of the wiles of Satan, who would like to see you die without confession."

"Then Satan would be baffled," said the sick man. "I confessed only a short while ago."

"To whom?"

"To a priest from Avignon."

Gorenflot shook his head.

"What do you mean? that he was not a priest?"

"That is my meaning."

"How do you know?"

"I know who he was."

"The man who just left me?"

"Yes," answered Gorenflot, in a tone of such conviction that, hard as it is to upset a lawyer, this one was disturbed.

"Now, as you are not getting better," said Gorenflot, "and as this man was not a priest, you must confess."

"I am perfectly willing," said the lawyer, in a voice that had grown perceptibly stronger; "but I intend confessing to whomsoever I choose."

"You have no time to send for another priest, my son, and, as I am here" —

"What! I have no time?" cried the invalid, in a voice that was louder and firmer even than before; "have I not told you that I am better? Am I not telling you now that I am sure to recover?"

Gorenflot shook his head for the third time.

"And I," said he, in the same phlegmatic manner, "I tell you, on the other hand, my son, that there is not the slightest hope for you. You are condemned by the doctors and also by Divine Providence; you may think me cruel in saying so, — very likely you do, — but this is a thing to which we must all come sooner or later. Justice must weigh us in her scales, and surely it ought to be a consolation to us to sink in this life, since thereby we rise into the other life. Pythagoras himself said so, my brother, and yet he was but a pagan. Therefore you must confess, my dear child."

"But I assure you, father, I have grown stronger, even since you entered, the effect, I presume, of your holy presence."

"A mistake, my son, a mistake," persisted Gorenflot; "there is at the last moment a vital resuscitation; the lamp flares up at the end, and then goes out forever. Come, now," continued the monk, sitting down at the bedside, "tell me of your intrigues, your plots, and all your machinations."

"My intrigues, my plots, and all my machinations!" repeated Nicolas David, shrinking back from this singular monk whom he did not know, and who seemed to know him so well.

"Yes," said Gorenflot, quietly arranging his large ears for their auricular duties and joining his two thumbs above his

interlaced fingers: "then, after you have told me everything, you will give me the papers, and perhaps God will allow me to absolve you."

"What papers?" cried the invalid, in a voice as strong and in tones as vigorous as if he had been in the best of health.

"The papers this pretended priest brought you from Avignon."

"And who told you this pretended priest brought me papers?" asked the lawyer, stretching a leg out from under the bedclothes and speaking so roughly that the monk was shaken out of a tendency to drowsiness that was beginning to affect him in his comfortable armchair.

Gorenflot thought the moment had come for a display of energy.

"He who told me knows what he told me," he returned; "come, come, the papers, or no absolution!"

"To the devil with your absolution, you scoundrel!" cried David, leaping out of bed and jumping at Gorenflot's throat.

"Why," cried the monk, "your fever is more violent than ever! and you won't confess! are you" —

The lawyer's thumb, adroitly and vigorously applied to the monk's throat, interrupted the last phrase, which ended in a whistle that was not unlike a rattle.

"I am going now to force you to confess, you shaveling of Beelzebub," cried David, "and as for my fever, you'll soon see it won't hinder me from strangling you."

Brother Gorenflot was robust, but he was, unfortunately, in that state of reaction when drunkenness acts on the nervous system and paralyzes it, which ordinarily occurs at the time when, by a contrary reaction, the mental powers are beginning to recover their vigor.

All he could do, then, was, by using whatever strength was left him, to rise from his chair, seize David's shirt with both hands, and thrust him back violently.

It is but just to say that, paralyzed as Brother Gorenflot was, he thrust Nicolas David back so violently that the latter fell in the middle of the room.

But he rose furious, and, seizing a long sword that hung on the wall behind his clothes, the same long sword that had been noticed by Maître Bernonillet, he drew it from the scabbard and presented the point at the neck of the monk, who, exhausted by his last effort, had fallen back on his chair.

"It is now your turn to confess," said he, in a hollow voice, "or else you die!"

Gorenflot, completely sobered by the disagreeable pressure of cold steel against his flesh, comprehended the gravity of the situation.

"Oh!" said he, "then you were not sick; your pretended agony was all a farce, was it?"

"You forget that it is not for you to question but to answer," retorted the lawyer.

"Answer what?"

"Whatever I choose to ask you."

"Ask, then."

"Who are you?"

"You can see for yourself," said the monk.

"That is not an answer," returned the lawyer, pressing the sword a little.

"Have a care, man! What the devil! If you kill me before I answer, you'll know nothing at all."

"You are right; your name?"

"Brother Gorenflot."

"You are a real monk, then?"

"A real monk? Of course I am."

"What brought you to Lyons?"

"I am exiled."

"What brought you to this hotel?"

"Chance."

"How long have you been here?"

"Sixteen days."

"Why were you spying on me?"

"I was not spying on you."

"How did you know I had received papers?"

"Because I had been told so."

"Who told you?"

"The man who sent me to you."

"Who sent you to me?"

"I cannot tell you."

"But you will tell me, nevertheless."

"Oh, oh! stop!" cried the monk. "*Vertudieu!* I'll cry out, I'll shout."

"And I'll kill you."

The monk uttered a cry; a drop of blood appeared on the point of the lawyer's sword.

"His name?" said the latter.

"Ah! well, well, so much the worse," said the monk, "I have held out as long as I could."

"Yes, yes, you have safeguarded your honor. The man who sent you to me, then" —

"It was" —

Gorenflot still hesitated; it cost him a good deal to betray his friend.

"Make an end of it, I say," cried the lawyer, with a stamp on the floor.

"Faith, so much the worse! It was Chicot."

"The King's jester?"

"The same."

"And where is he?"

"Here!" cried a voice.

And Chicot stood on the threshold, pale, stern, with a naked sword in his hand.

CHAPTER XXXII.

HOW CHICOT, AFTER MAKING A HOLE WITH A GIMLET,
MAKES ONE WITH HIS SWORD.

As soon as Maître Nicolas David recognized the man he knew for his mortal enemy, he could not repress a movement of terror.

Gorenflot took advantage of this movement to slip to one side and so break the rectilinearity of the line between his neck and the hilt of the lawyer's sword.

"Help, dear friend!" he cried; "murder! help! Save me!"

"Aha! indeed! So, then, my dear M. David," said Chicot, "it is really you?"

"Yes," stammered David; "yes, it is I, undoubtedly."

"Enchanted to have the pleasure of meeting you," returned the Gascon.

Then, turning to the monk:

"My good Gorenflot," said he, "your presence as a monk was necessary a while ago, when we believed that the gentleman was dying; but now that the gentleman is evidently in the enjoyment of marvellous good health, he no longer needs a

confessor, but rather to transact a little business with another gentleman ; this time, a gentleman by birth."

David tried to sneer contemptuously.

"Yes, a gentleman, in the proper sense of the term," said Chicot, "and one who will prove to you that he comes of good stock. My dear Gorenflot," said he, addressing the monk, "do me the favor to go and stand as sentinel on the landing, and see to it that no one, whoever he may be, interrupt the little conversation I am about to have with this gentleman."

Gorenflot asked no better than to get as far away as possible from Nicolas David. As soon as he had made the circuit it was necessary to describe for this purpose, clinging to the walls as closely as he could, he rushed out of the chamber, a hundred pounds lighter than when he entered it.

Chicot, as calm as ever, closed the door behind him and then bolted it.

At first David had viewed these proceedings with an agitation that naturally resulted from the unexpected nature of the situation ; but he soon recovered his self-control ; he had confidence in his skill as a swordsman, and he had only a single opponent to deal with. When the Gascon turned round after shutting the door, he saw the lawyer waiting for him at the foot of the bed, his sword in his hand and a smile on his lips.

"Dress yourself, monsieur," said Chicot. "I will give you time to do so, for I do not wish to take any advantage of you. I know you are a valiant fencer and handle the sword as well as Le Clere himself ; but that is all the same to me."

Nicolas David gave a short laugh.

"Your jest is good," said he.

"Yes," answered Chicot ; "so it appears to me, at least, --- I suppose because I made it, --- but it will appear to you even better in a moment, for you are a man of taste. Do you know what I have come into this room for, Maître Nicolas ?"

"The balance of the blows I owed you in the Duc de Mayenne's name, ever since the day you jumped so nimbly out of the window."

"No, monsieur ; I remember the number and will, you may rest assured, return them to the man who ordered them to be given me. What I have come for is a certain genealogy carried to Avignon by M. Pierre de Gondy, who knew not what he was carrying, brought back again by M. Pierre de

Gondy, who knew not what he was bringing back, and placed by him in your hands a short while ago."

David turned pale.

"What genealogy?" said he.

"The genealogy of the Guises, who, as you know, are descended from Charlemagne in the direct line."

"Ah! ah!" said David, "you are a spy, monsieur; I used to think you were only a buffoon."

"My dear monsieur, I will be both, if you like, on the present occasion: a spy to hang you, and a buffoon to make merry over the hanging."

"To hang me!"

"High and dry, monsieur. You do not claim, I hope, that you have a right to be beheaded: that right appertains only to gentlemen."

"And how will you go about it?"

"Oh, the thing is very simple: I will relate the truth, that's all that is necessary. I may as well tell you, my dear M. David, that I was present, last month, at the little conventicle held in the convent of Sainte Geneviève between their Most Serene Highnesses the Guises and Madame de Montpensier."

"You?"

"Yes, I was in the confessional facing yours; very uncomfortable, are they not? the more so in my case, at least, because I could not leave till all was over, and the affair was of unconscionable length. I was, therefore, present at the speeches of M. de Monsoreau, La Hurière, and a certain monk whose name I have forgotten, but whom I thought very eloquent. I know all about the coronation of M. d'Anjou, which was not particularly amusing; but, on the other hand, the afterpiece was very laughable. They played: 'The Genealogy of Messieurs de Lorraine, revised, augmented, and corrected by Maître Nicolas David.' It was a very droll farce, lacking only the sign manual of his Holiness."

"Ah! you know about the genealogy?" said David, almost beside himself and biting his lips in his rage.

"Yes," said Chicot, "and I found it wonderfully ingenious, especially the part about the Salic law. Only so much cleverness is rather a misfortune, after all: the possessor of it often gets hanged. Consequently, inspired with tender pity for a man so gifted — 'What!' said I to myself, 'shall I let them hang this worthy M. David, the most agreeable of fencing-

masters, the most astute of lawyers, and my very good friend besides, and that, too, when I can not only save him from the rope, but also make the fortune of this admirable advocate, this excellent fencing-master, this kind-hearted friend, the first who, by taking the measure of my back, showed me how to take the measure of my heart; no, such shall not be the case.' Whereupon, having heard that you intended to travel, I determined to travel with, or rather behind, you. You came out by the Porte Bordelle, did you not? I was watching you. You did not see me, and that is not surprising, for I was well concealed. From that moment I have followed you, losing you, catching up with you, taking a great deal of trouble, I assure you. At last we reached Lyons — I say *we*, because, an hour after you, I entered the same hotel, and not only entered the same hotel, but hired the room next to yours. Look, it is separated from yours only by a mere partition; you can well imagine I did not come all the way from Paris to Lyons to lose sight of you here. No, I made a little hole through which I had the privilege of observing you whenever I liked, and I confess I gave myself this pleasure several times a day. At last, you fell sick: the innkeeper wanted to turn you out of doors. But you had made an appointment with M. de Gondy at the Cygne de la Croix: you were afraid he might not find you elsewhere, or, at least, not find you soon enough. The stratagem you adopted only half deceived me; however, as, after all, you might be really ill, for we are all mortal, a truth of which I will try to convince you later on. I sent you a worthy monk, my friend and comrade, to endeavor to excite you to repentance, to arouse in you a feeling of remorse. But in vain; hardened sinner that you are, you wanted to pierce his neck with your rapier, forgetting this maxim of the Gospel: 'All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.' Therefore, my dear M. David, I come to you and say: 'We are old acquaintances, old friends; let us arrange the matter.' Are you willing to do so?"

"In what manner?"

"In the manner in which it would have been arranged if you had been really ill, and if, after my friend Gorenflot had confessed you, you had handed him the papers he asked for. Then I would have pardoned you and even said a sincere *in manus* for your soul's salvation. Well, I will not be more exacting in the case of the living than I would be in the case of

the dead, and what I have to say to you is this: 'M. David, you are an accomplished man. Fencing, horsemanship, chicanery, the art of putting fat purses into big pockets—you are skilful in them all. It would be sad if such a man as you suddenly disappeared from that world in which he was destined to have such brilliant fortune. Well, then, dear M. David, engage in no more conspiracies, trust to me, break with the Guises, give me your papers, and I pledge you my word as a gentleman that I will make your peace with the King.'

"While, on the contrary, if I do not give them"—inquired Nicolas David.

"Ah! if you do not give them, it is another thing. In that case, I pledge you my honor I will kill you! Does that still seem amusing to you, dear M. David?"

"More so than ever," answered the lawyer, toying with his sword.

"But if you give them to me," continued Chicot, "all shall be forgotten. You may not, perhaps, believe me, dear M. David, for you have an evil nature, and you fancy that my heart is coated with resentment as iron is coated with rust. No; it is true I hate you, but I hate M. de Mayenne more. Give me the means of ruining him and I will save you. And then, will you allow me to utter a few words more which you will not believe, for you love nothing but yourself? I love the King, love him, though I know that he is silly, corrupt, degenerate; yes, I love the King who protected and sheltered me from your butcher Mayenne that assassinated a single gentleman at the Place du Louvre at the head of fifteen bandits. You know of whom I speak, of poor Saint-Mégrin: were you not one of his murderers? No? So much the better, I believed you were, and I am sure of it now. Well, I want him to reign in peace, this poor King Henri of mine, a thing utterly impossible with your Mayennes and your Nicolas David genealogies. Deliver that genealogy to me, then, and I pledge you my honor I'll conceal your name and make your fortune."

During this lengthened exposition of his ideas, and its length was not without a purpose, Chicot was observing David with his keen and intelligent eyes, and not once did he see the lawyer's features soften, not once did he see the feeling that springs from a kindly thought sweep over that gloomy countenance, or a heartfelt emotion relax the convulsive clutch of that nervous hand on the sword-hilt.

"Well," said Chicot, "I see that all my eloquence is lost and you do not believe me. But I have a way to punish you, first, for the injury you did me of old, and then, to rid the earth of a man who believes neither in honesty nor justice. I am going to have you hanged. Adieu, M. David."

And he stepped back toward the door, all the time keeping his eye on the lawyer.

David bounded forward.

"And you think I shall let you depart?" cried the lawyer. "No, no, my fine spy; no, no, Chicot, my friend; when a man knows a secret like that of the genealogy, he dies! When a man threatens Nicolas David, he dies! When a man enters here as you have entered, he dies!"

"You make me quite easy in my mind," answered Chicot, with his usual calmness. "I hesitated only because I am sure to kill you. Crillon taught me, two months ago, while I was practising with him, a peculiar kind of lunge, only a single thrust, but all that is needed, I pledge you my word. Come, hand me the papers," he cried in a terrible voice, "or I kill you! And I will tell you how: I will pierce your throat just in the very spot where you wanted to bleed my friend Gorenflot."

Almost before Chicot had finished these words, David rushed upon him, with a savage outburst of laughter; Chicot awaited him, sword in hand.

The two adversaries were pretty evenly matched in size; but Chicot's clothes concealed his spareness, while nothing hid the lank, slender, flexible figure of the lawyer. He was not unlike some long serpent, his nimble sword moving with lightning rapidity in this direction and that, as if it were the serpent's triple fang. But he found a dangerous antagonist in Chicot, as the latter had told him. In fact, the Gascon, who fenced almost every day with the King, had become one of the most skilful swordsmen in the kingdom. Nicolas David soon began to perceive this, for, no matter how he attacked his enemy, the latter always foiled him.

He retreated a step.

"Ah!" said Chicot, "now you are beginning to understand, are you? Once more; give me the papers."

David's only answer was to throw himself again upon the Gascon, and a new combat ensued, longer and fiercer than the first, although Chicot contented himself with parrying, and had not yet struck a blow.

This second contest ended, like the first, in a backward step by the lawyer.

"Ah, ah!" said Chicot; "my turn now."

And he took a step forward.

While he was advancing, Nicolas David made ready to stop him. Chicot parried in prime, beat down his adversary's guard, reached the spot where he had declared his intention of striking David, and plunged his sword half its length through his enemy's throat.

"That is the stroke," said he.

David did not answer, but fell at Chicot's feet, pouring out a mouthful of blood.

And now it was Chicot's turn to retreat a step. Wounded though it be, the serpent can still rear its head, and sting.

But David, by a natural impulse, tried to drag himself toward his bed so as to defend his secret to the last.

"Ah!" said Chicot, "I thought you as cunning as a fox; but, on the contrary, you are as stupid as a reiter. I did not know where the papers were, and now you tell me."

And while David struggled in the agonies of death, Chicot ran to the bed, raised the mattress, and under it found a little roll of parchment, which the lawyer, in his ignorance of the catastrophe that menaced him, had not dreamed of concealing more securely.

At the very moment he unrolled it to make sure it was the document he was in search of, rage gave David strength to rise; then he fell back and expired.

Chicot ran over the parchment brought by Pierre de Gondy, his eyes sparkling with joy and pride.

The legate of the Pope, faithful to the policy of the sovereign pontiff since his accession to the throne, had written at the bottom:

"Fiat ut Deus voluit: Deus jura hominum fecit."

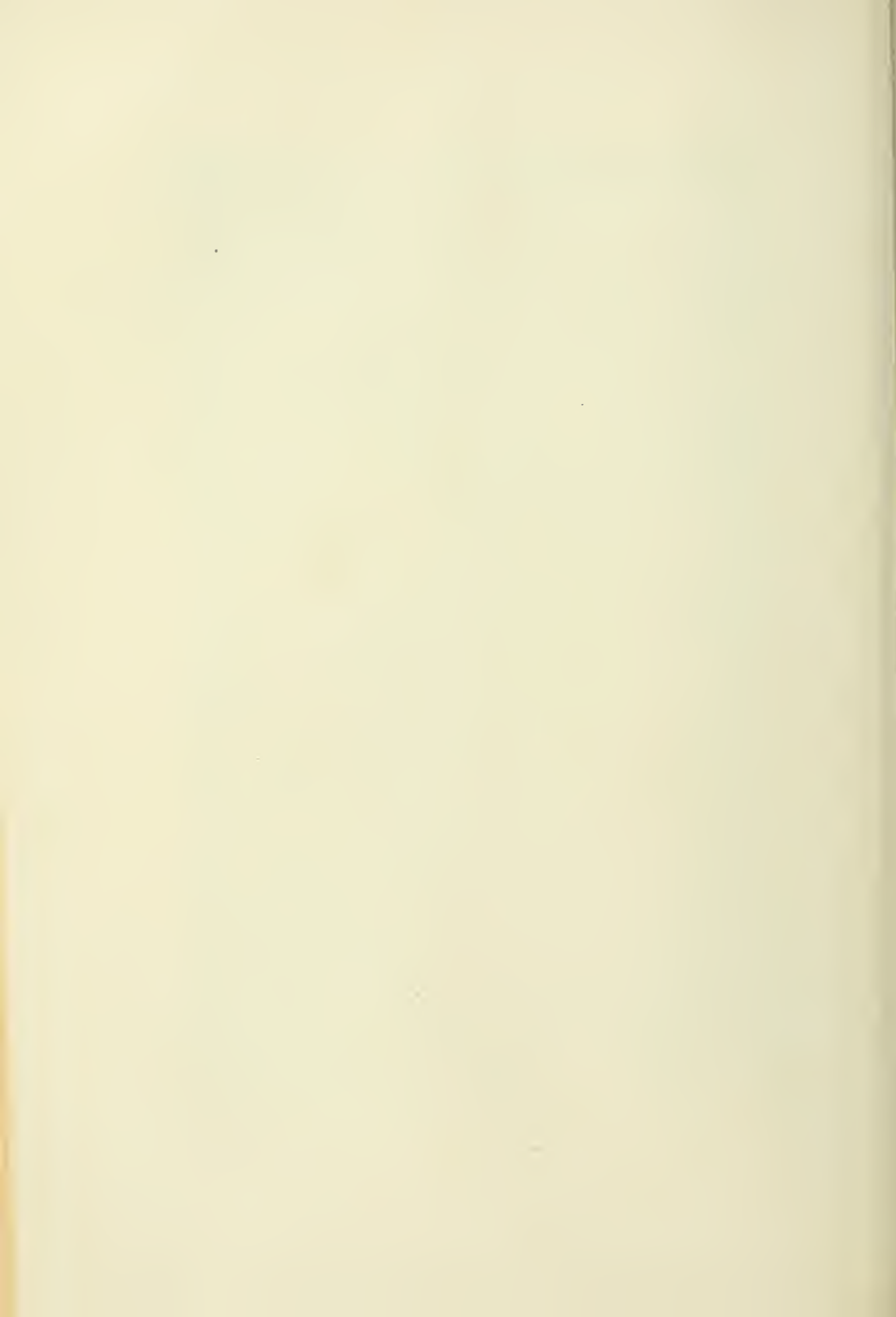
"Hum!" muttered Chicot, "this Pope is rather hard on our most Christian King."

And folding the parchment carefully, he introduced it into the safest pocket in his doublet, namely, the one next his breast.

Then he lifted the body of the lawyer, who had died without losing more blood, the nature of the wound making him bleed inwardly, put it back again in the bed, turned the face to the wall, and, opening the door, called Gorenflot.



CHICOT RAN OVER THE PARCHMENT BROUGHT BY PIERRE DE GONDY,
HIS EYES SPARKLING WITH JOY AND PRIDE.



Gorenflot entered.

"How pale you are!" said the monk.

"Yes," said Chicot, "the last moments of this poor man have caused me some emotion."

"Is he dead?" asked Gorenflot.

"There is every reason to think so," answered Chicot.

"But he was so well a while ago."

"Too well. He insisted on swallowing something hard to digest, and, as in the case of Anacreon, the morsel went the wrong way."

"Oho!" said Gorenflot, "and the rascal wanted to strangle me — me, an ecclesiastic! No wonder he has been unfortunate!"

"Pardon him, comrade. you are a Christian."

"I do pardon him," answered Gorenflot, "although he gave me an awful fright."

"That is not enough," said Chicot: "you must light some tapers and say a few prayers beside his body."

"Why?"

This "why" was, it will have been noticed, Gorenflot's customary interrogative.

"What do you mean by your 'why' ? Well, then, there is danger that you may be dragged to prison as his murderer."

"I this man's murderer! Oh, nonsense! It was he who wanted to strangle me."

"Of course, I know that, and as he could not succeed, his fury set his blood violently in motion; a vessel burst inside his breast, and so he has crossed the ferry. You see, then, that, taking it all in all, you are the cause of his death, Gorenflot. The innocent cause, 't is true. But, nevertheless, you might have a good deal to suffer before your innocence was proved."

"I think, M. Chicot, you are right," said the monk.

"The more so as the official in the city who deals with such matters happens to be a rather tough customer."

"Jesus!" murmured the monk.

"Do what I tell you, then, comrade."

"What am I to do?"

"Stay here in this room, recite piously all the prayers you know, and even all the prayers you don't know, and when evening comes and you are alone, leave this hostelry, neither at a snail's pace nor yet in a hurry. You are acquainted with the farrier who lives at the corner of the street?"

"Certainly; it was he who gave me this last night," said Gorenflot, pointing to his black eye.

"Touching remembrance! Well, I'll see to it that you find your horse there. Now, pay particular attention: you will mount your horse and take the road to Paris; at Villeneuve le Roi you will sell him and take back Panurge."

"Ah! my good Panurge! You are right, I shall be delighted to see him again; I love him. But," added the monk, piteously, "how am I to live on the way?"

"When I give, I give," answered Chicot, "and I do not let my friends go a-begging, as yours do at the convent of St. Geneviève; hold."

And Chicot drew from his pocket a fistful of crowns, which he poured into the monk's big hand.

"Generous man!" exclaimed Gorenflot, moved even to tears, "let me remain with you in Lyons. I am fond of Lyons; it is the second capital of the realm, and a most hospitable capital it is."

"Now, try and understand one thing, at least, you dunder-head! The thing you must understand is that I do not remain here, that I am about to start for Paris, and shall ride so fast you never could keep up with me."

"Thy will be done, M. Chicot!" said the monk, resignedly.

"Now you are as you ought to be!" said Chicot: "I love you best when you are in the mood you are at present."

And, after installing the monk at the side of the bed, he went downstairs to see his host.

"Maître Bernouillet," he said, taking him aside, "a great event has occurred in your house, although you have not the slightest suspicion of it."

"Goodness!" exclaimed the innkeeper, looking scared, "what has happened?"

"That malignant royalist, that despiser of religion, that abominable frequenter of Huguenots"—

"Well?"

"Received the visit of a messenger from Rome this morning."

"I know all that: it was I who informed you of the fact."

"Well, then, our Holy Father the Pope, who is the temporal justiciary of this world, sent this man directly to this conspirator—but the conspirator probably never suspected for what purpose."

"And for what purpose did he send him?"

"Go up to the chamber of your guest, M. Bernouillet, turn up the end of the bedclothes, look in the neighborhood of the neck, and you will know."

"Mercy on us! you frighten me."

"I say no more. The sentence has been executed in your house. The Pope has done you a signal honor, Maître Bernouillet."

Thereupon Chicot slipped ten gold crowns into his host's hands and went to the stables, from which he led out the two horses.

Meanwhile the innkeeper flew upstairs more lightly than a bird, and entered the chamber of Maître Nicolas David.

He found Gorenflot praying.

He drew near the bed, and, as he had been instructed to do, raised the bedclothes.

The wound, still red, was in the place mentioned: but the body was already cold.

"May all the enemies of our holy religion die thus!" said Bernouillet, making a significant gesture to Gorenflot.

"Amen!" answered the monk.

These events took place almost at the same time that Bussy restored Diane de Méridor to the arms of her father, who had believed her dead.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOW THE DUC D'ANJOU DISCOVERED THAT DIANE WAS NOT DEAD.

DURING this time the last days of April had arrived.

The great cathedral of Chartres was hung with white, and the pillars were garlanded with foliage which took the place of the absent flowers.

The King was standing in the middle of the nave, barefooted, as indeed, was the case ever since he had entered the city through the Porte de Chartres. He looked round occasionally to see if all his friends and courtiers had faithfully kept their appointment. But some of them whose feet had been flayed by the rough streets had put on their shoes again; others, being either hungry or tired, were eating or sleeping in some of the hostelries on the route, into which they had stolen on the sly;

and only a small number had the courage to stay in the church on the damp floor, with bare legs under their penitent robes.

The religious ceremony, which was for the purpose of praying for an heir to the throne of France, was drawing to an end. The two chemises of Our Lady, which, on account of the numerous miracles they had wrought, had a high reputation for their prolific virtue, had been taken from their shrines of gold, and the people, who had come in crowds to witness this solemnity, bowed their heads beneath the burning rays that flashed from the tabernacle when the two tunics were drawn from it.

Henri III. heard a strange sound amid the general silence : it was like a burst of stifled laughter, and, from habit, he looked to see if Chicot was not there, for, to his mind, none but Chicot would have dared to laugh at such a moment.

It was not Chicot, however. Chicot, alas ! was absent, a source of much sorrow to the King, who, it will be remembered, had lost sight of him suddenly on the Fontainebleau highway and not heard of him since. This was a cavalier who had been carried to the church by a horse that was still steaming, and who had made his way with his muddy boots and soiled clothes through the barefooted courtiers in their penitent robes and sacks.

Although he saw the King turn round, he stood boldly in the choir, for this cavalier was a courtier, as was denoted by his attitude even more than by the elegance of his costume.

Henri, irritated at seeing so unpunctual a cavalier making such a noise and exhibiting by his dress so insolent a disregard for the monastic garb that had been prescribed for the day, darted a glance at him that was full of reproof and anger.

The newcomer did not pretend to perceive it, and, crossing some flagstone upon which were carved the effigies of certain bishops, he knelt beside the velvet chair of M. le Duc d'Anjou, who, being absorbed in his thoughts rather than in his prayers, was not paying the slightest attention to what was passing around him.

However, when he felt the touch of this newcomer, he turned quickly, and, in a low voice, exclaimed :

“ Bussy ! ”

“ Good-day, monseigneur,” answered the cavalier, as indifferently as if he had left the duke the evening before and nothing unusual had occurred since they were together.

“ But,” said the prince, “ are you crazy ? ”

“ Why so, monseigneur ? ”

“ To leave any place, no matter where, and come here to see the chemises of Our Lady.”

“ The reason is, monseigneur, that I must speak with you immediately.”

“ Why did you not come sooner ? ”

“ Probably because I could not.”

“ But what has occurred during the three weeks you have disappeared ? ”

“ That is just what I want to speak to you about.”

“ Well, you must wait until we get out of the church.”

“ Alas ! I see I must, and that is the very thing that annoys me.”

“ Hush ! we’re at the end ; have patience, and we’ll go home together.”

“ It is what I reckoned on doing, monseigneur.”

The ceremony, as the prince stated, was nearly over. The King had just passed the rather coarse chemise of Our Lady over his own fine linen, and the Queen, aided by her maids of honor, was now doing the same.

Then the King knelt and the Queen imitated him ; both remained for a moment in earnest prayer under a vast canopy, while the courtiers prostrated themselves on the floor, with a view to gaining the good graces of their sovereign.

After this, the King rose, doffed the holy tunic, saluted the archbishop, saluted the Queen, and proceeded to the door of the cathedral.

But he stopped on the way : he had perceived Bussy.

“ Ah ! monsieur,” said he, “ it would seem our devotions are not to your taste, else you would hardly wear gold and silk when your sovereign wears drugget and serge.”

“ Sire,” answered Bussy, with dignity, though his impatience under the rebuke made him change color, “ no one, even among those whose garb is humblest and whose feet are most lacerated, has a keener zeal for your Majesty’s service than I. But I have arrived after a long and wearisome journey, and I only learned this morning of your Majesty’s departure for Chartres : I have, therefore, travelled twenty-two leagues in five hours, sire, for the purpose of joining your Majesty : that is the reason I had not time to change my dress, a circumstance your Majesty, for that matter, would never have noticed if, instead

of coming to unite my humble prayers with yours. I had remained in Paris."

The King appeared satisfied, but, when he perceived that his friends shrugged their shoulders during Bussy's explanation, he feared to offend them by showing any favor to his brother's gentleman, and went on.

Bussy, not troubled in the slightest, let him pass.

"What!" said the Duc d'Anjou, "did you not see?"

"See what?"

"Schomberg, Quélus, and Maugiron shrugging their shoulders at your expense."

"Oh, yes, monseigneur, I saw all that perfectly," answered Bussy, with great calmness.

"Well?"

"Well! do you believe I am going to cut the throats of my fellow-men in a church, or, at least, quite close to one? I am too good a Christian to think of it."

"Oh, all right," said the Duc d'Anjou, in amazement; "I imagined that either you did not see or did not wish to see."

Bussy shrugged his shoulders in his turn, and, taking the prince aside, when they were out of the church:

"We are going to your lodgings, are we not, monseigneur?" he inquired.

"Immediately, for you ought certainly to have a good deal to tell me."

"Yes, monseigneur, you guess correctly; I am perfectly sure of certain things of which you have no suspicion."

The duke looked at Bussy in open-eyed amazement.

"Well, let me salute the King, and I am with you."

The prince went and took leave of his brother, who gave him permission to return to Paris whenever he liked.

Then, returning to Bussy with all speed, he took him with him to one of the apartments in the hotel assigned him as a residence.

"Now, my friend," said he, "sit down there, and tell me of all your adventures. Do you know I thought you were dead?"

"I can well imagine it, monseigneur."

"Do you know that every one at court dressed in white to mark his joy at your disappearance, and that many a breast has breathed freely for the first time since you could draw a sword? But that is not the question at present. Well, then,

you left me to follow the track of a beautiful unknown ! Who was this woman and what am I to hope for ? ”

“ You must reap what you have sown, monseigneur, that is to say, a considerable harvest of shame ! ”

“ What do you mean ? ” inquired the duke, more astonished at the words than even at the disrespectful tone in which they were uttered.

“ You have heard me, monseigneur,” said Bussy, coldly ; “ it is useless, then, for me to repeat.”

“ Explain yourself, monsieur, and leave such enigmas and anagrams to Chicot.”

“ Oh, nothing is easier, monseigneur ; all I have to do is to appeal to your memory.”

“ But who is this woman ? ”

“ I thought you had recognized her, monseigneur.”

“ Then it was she ! ” cried the duke.

“ Yes, monseigneur.”

“ You have seen her ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Did she speak ? ”

“ Certainly ; it is only ghosts who do not speak. After what had occurred, you had reason to believe her dead, and you may have hoped that she was.”

The duke turned pale, crushed by the stern words of him who ought to be his champion.

“ Yes, monseigneur,” continued Bussy, “ although you have driven to martyrdom a young girl of noble birth, that young girl has escaped her martyrdom ; but do not breathe yet, do not think yourself absolved, for, though she has saved her life, she has met with a misfortune worse than death.”

“ What is it ? What has happened to her ? ” said the prince, trembling.

“ What has happened to her, monseigneur, is that a man has saved her honor, has saved her life, but his help has cost her so dear that she regrets it was ever rendered.”

“ Finish, finish, I say.”

“ Well, then, monseigneur, the *Demôiselle de Méridor*, to escape from the arms of the *Duc d'Anjou*, whose mistress she would not be, has flung herself into the arms of a man she execrates.”

“ What do you say ? ”

"I say that Diane de Méridor is known to-day as Madame de Monsoreau."

At these words, instead of the paleness that ordinarily was spread over the cheeks of François, such a flush of blood surged to his face that it seemed to gush from his eyes.

"*Sang du Christ!*" cried the prince, furiously, "can this be true?"

"It must be, since I have said it," answered Bussy, haughtily.

"I did not mean that," said the prince, "I never doubted your loyalty, Bussy. I was only wondering if a Monsoreau, one of my own gentlemen, could have dared to interfere between me and a woman I honored with my love."

"And why not?" asked Bussy.

"Then you would have done what he has done — you, too?"

"I would have done more, I would have warned you that you were dishonoring yourself."

"Listen, Bussy," said the duke, becoming suddenly calm, "listen, if you please; you understand, of course, that I do not condescend to justify myself."

"There you are wrong, my prince; where honor is concerned you are only a gentleman, like the rest of us."

"Well, for that very reason, I will ask you to be the judge of M. de Monsoreau."

"I?"

"Yes, you, and to tell me whether he is not a traitor — a traitor to me."

"To you?"

"To me, whose intentions he knew."

"And the intentions of your highness were" —

"Of course, to win the love of Diane."

"To win her love?"

"Yes, but in no case to employ violence."

"Then these were your intentions, monseigneur?" asked Bussy, with an ironical smile.

"Undoubtedly, and these intentions I kept to up to the last moment, although M. de Monsoreau argued against them with all the logic of which he is capable."

"Monseigneur! monseigneur! what is this you say? This man has urged you to dishonor Diane?"

"Yes."

"By his counsels?"

"By his letters. Should you like to see one of them?"

"Oh!" cried Bussy, "if I could believe that!"

"Wait a second and you'll see."

And the duke ran to his study for a little box, over which a page always kept guard, and took a note from it which he gave to Bussy.

"Read," said he, "since you doubt the word of your prince."

Bussy seized the note, his hand trembling with uncertainty, and read:

"*Monseigneur :*

"Your highness may be at your ease; this enterprise does not involve any risk, for the young lady starts this evening to spend a week with an aunt who lives at the Castle of Lude; I take charge of the whole matter, then, and you need not be anxious. As for the young lady's scruples, I am pretty sure they will vanish when she finds herself in your highness' presence; meanwhile, I act, and this evening she will be in the Castle of Beaugé.

"Of your highness the respectful servant,

"Bryant de Monsoreau."

"Well! what do you say to that, Bussy?" asked the prince, after his gentleman had read the letter a second time.

"I say that you are well served, monseigneur."

"Which means that I am betrayed."

"Ah, you are right; I forgot the end."

"Tricked! the wretch! He made me believe in the death of a woman" —

"He stole from you; his crime is very black, indeed; but," added Bussy, with caustic irony, "M. de Monsoreau's love is an excuse."

"Ah! that is your opinion, is it," said the duke, with his devilish smile.

"Faith," answered Bussy, "I have no opinion on the matter at all; if it's your opinion it's my opinion."

"What should you do in my place? But first, wait a moment. What did he do himself?"

"He made the father believe you were the ravisher, offered his help, and appeared at the Castle of Beaugé with a letter from the Baron de Méridor. Then he brought a boat under the windows, carried off the prisoner, shut her up in the house

you know of, and, by constantly working on her fears, forced her to become his wife."

"And is not such treachery infamous?" cried the duke.

"Placed under the shelter of your own, monseigneur," answered Bussy, with his ordinary boldness.

"Ah, Bussy, you shall see how I will avenge myself!"

"Avenge yourself! Nonsense, monseigneur, you will do no such thing."

"Why?"

"Princes do not avenge themselves, monseigneur, they punish. You will charge this Monsoreau with his infamous conduct, and punish him."

"But how?"

"By restoring happiness to Mademoiselle de Méridor."

"And can I?"

"Certainly."

"In what way?"

"By restoring to her her liberty."

"Come, now, explain."

"Nothing more easy; the marriage was forced, therefore it is null."

"You are right."

"Have the marriage annulled, and you will have acted, monseigneur, like a loyal gentleman and a noble princee."

"Ah!" said the princee, suspiciously, "what warmth! You are interested in this, Bussy?"

"I? Not the least in the world, monseigneur; what interests me, monseigneur, is that no one may be able to say that Louis de Clermont, Comte de Bussy, is in the service of a perfidious princee and a dishonorable man."

"Well, you shall see. But how are we to break the marriage?"

"Nothing more easy. Make her father act."

"The Baron de Méridor?"

"Yes."

"But he is away in Anjou."

"No, monseigneur, he is in Paris."

"At your house?"

"No, at his daughter's. Tell him, monseigneur, that he may rely on you, that, instead of regarding you as an enemy, as he does at present, he may regard you as a protector, and he, who cursed your name, will bless it as that of his good genius."

"He is a powerful nobleman in his own country," said the duke, "and is said to be very influential throughout the province."

"Yes, monseigneur, but what you ought to remember before anything else is that he is a father, that his daughter is unhappy, and that her unhappiness is the cause of his."

"And when can I see him?"

"As soon as you return to Paris."

"Very well."

"It is agreed, then, is it not, monseigneur?"

"Yes."

"On your honor as a gentleman?"

"On my honor as a prince."

"And when do you start?"

"This evening. Will you come with me?"

"No, I must precede you."

"Go, and be sure to be at hand."

"I am yours forever, monseigneur. Where shall I find you?"

"At the King's levee, about noon to-morrow."

"I will be there, monseigneur; adieu."

Bussy did not lose a moment, and the distance which it took the duke, sleeping in his litter, fifteen hours to accomplish, the young man, who was returning to Paris in an ecstasy of love and joy, got through in five, in order that he might console the baron, to whom he had offered his help, and comfort Diane, to whom he was about to offer the half of his life.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOW CHICOT RETURNED TO THE LOUVRE AND WAS RECEIVED
BY KING HENRI III.

EVERYBODY was asleep in the Louvre, for it was not yet eleven in the morning; the sentries in the courtyard seemed to move with cautious footsteps; the gentlemen who relieved guard walked their horses slowly.

The King was exhausted by his pilgrimage and had need of repose.

Two men appeared at the same time in front of the principal

gate of the Louvre, the one on a magnificent barb, the other on an Andalusian covered with perspiration.

They halted before the gate and exchanged looks, for, having come from opposite directions, they met at this point.

"M. de Chicot," cried the younger of the two, with a polite salutation, "how do you feel this morning?"

"What! it is Seigneur de Bussy. Wonderfully well, thank you, monsieur," answered Chicot with an ease and courtesy that betrayed the gentleman to quite as great a degree as the salutation of Bussy betrayed the great nobleman and the elegant courtier.

"You come for the levee of the King, do you not, monsieur?" inquired Bussy.

"And you also, I presume?"

"No. I come to pay my respects to Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou. You are aware, M. de Chicot," added Bussy, with a smile, "that I have not the honor of being among his Majesty's favorites."

"The reproach is for the King and not for you, monsieur!"

Bussy bowed.

"Have you come from a distance?" inquired Bussy. "I was told you were travelling."

"Yes, monsieur, I was hunting," answered Chicot. "But, by the way, have you not been travelling, too?"

"Yes, I have been making a tour in the provinces. And now, monsieur," continued Bussy, "would you be kind enough to do me a favor?"

"Certainly, I shall feel infinitely honored if I have it in my power to render any service to M. de Bussy," said Chicot.

"Well, then, as you are a privileged person, and can enter the Louvre, while I must remain in the antechamber, will you oblige me by informing the Duc d'Anjou that I am waiting for him?"

"M. le Duc d'Anjou is in the Louvre and will doubtless be present at the King's levee; why not enter along with me, monsieur?"

"I am afraid his Majesty would not view my appearance with pleasure."

"Pshaw!"

"Faith, he has not, so far, accustomed me to his gracious smiles."

"You may rest assured that, from this time forward, all that is going to change."

"Aha! are you a sorcerer, M. de Chicot?"

"Sometimes. Courage, M. de Bussy, come with me."

Bussy yielded, and they entered together, the one going to the apartments of the Duc d'Anjou, who, as we think we have already stated, lodged in the suite that had once belonged to Queen Marguerite, the other to the chamber of the King.

Henri III. was awake and had rung; a throng of valets and friends had hurried into the royal chamber; the chicken broth, spiced wine, and meat pies had been already served, when Chicot appeared in his august majesty's presence, with as frisky a gait as ever, and, without saying by your leave, began eating from the King's dish and drinking from the golden goblet.

"*Par le mordieu!*" cried the enraptured monarch, pretending to be in a great rage, "if it isn't that rascal Chicot! a fugitive, a vagabond, a miscreant!"

"I say! I say, my good son! what ails you?" said Chicot, sitting down unceremoniously in his dusty boots; "so we are forgetting our forced march from Poland, when we played the part of the stag, with all the magnates shouting: 'Yoicks! tally-ho!' at our tail" —

"Well, well," said Henri, "so my torment has returned, to be a thorn in my side as usual, and I had such peace for the last three weeks!"

"Bah!" retorted Chicot, "you are always complaining; devil take me but you are as bad as your subjects, who, at least, have some reason for it. And now, Harry mine, what have you been doing in my absence? Have we been governing our fair realm of France in our usual comical way?"

"M. Chicot!"

"Do our people still make faces at us?"

"You rascal!"

"Have we hanged any of these little curled darlings? Ah! I beg your pardon, M. de Quélus. I did not see you."

"Chicot, we're going to have a quarrel."

"And, above all, my son, is there any money still left in our coffers or in those of the Jews? I hope there is; *ventre de biche!* life is such a bore we must have some diversion!"

And thereupon he made away with the last meat pie on the silver-gilt dish.

The King burst out laughing, his usual way of ending their disputes.

"Come, now," said he, "tell me what you have been doing during your long absence?"

"I have," answered Chicot, "been concocting the plot of a little procession in three acts:

"*First Act.* — Penitents, in shirt and breeches only, wind along from the Louvre up to Montmartre, abusing one another like pickpockets all the time.

"*Second Act.* — Same penitents, stripped to the waist and flogging one another with rosaries that have their beads sharpened to a point, descend from Montmartre to the Abbey of St. Geneviève.

"*Third Act.* — Same penitents, entirely naked, beat one another black and blue, tear one another's hides with cat-o'-nine-tails, scourges, etc., on their return from the Abbey of St. Geneviève to the Louvre.

"I had thought at first of having them all pass through the Place de Grève, where the executioner would have burned every mother's son of them — it would have been a thrilling and unexpected catastrophe; but then I thought again: the Lord has still a little sulphur of Sodom and a little pitch of Gomorrha up yonder, and I do not wish to deprive him of the pleasure of grilling them himself. And so, gentlemen, while waiting for that great day, let us have as much fun as we can in the meantime."

"Yes, but all that does not tell me what had become of you," said the King. "Do you know I had every brothel in Paris searched for you?"

"Then you rummaged the Louvre thoroughly?"

"Next, I feared some of your highwaymen friends had got hold of you."

"That could not be, Henri, it is you that have got hold of all the highwaymen; they are here."

"Then I was mistaken?"

"Egad! yes, as you always are about everything."

"Perhaps you'll tell us you were doing penance for your sins."

"You have it at last. I stayed awhile in a convent to find out what it felt like. Faith, I made some surprising discoveries, and I'm through with the monks."

Just then M. de Monsoreau entered and saluted the King with the deepest respect.

"Ah! it is you, M. le Grand Veneur," said Henri; "when are we going to have some good hunting?"

"Whenever your Majesty pleases. I have just been told that boars are numerous in Saint-Germain-en-Laye."

"He is a parlous beast, your boar," said Chicot. "King Charles IX., if my memory fail me not, had a very narrow escape from a boar when he was hunting. And then, the spears are hard and raise blisters on our little hands; do they not, my son?"

M. de Monsoreau looked askance at Chicot.

"Hold!" said the Gascon to Henri, "your grand huntsman must have met a wolf not so very long ago."

"Why so?"

"Because like the Clouds in the play of Aristophanes, he has taken the form of one, in the eye especially; 't is startling."

M. de Monsoreau grew pale, and, turning around:

"M. Chicot," said he, "I have but a limited knowledge of buffoons, having seldom frequented the court, and I warn you that I do not propose to tolerate your jeers in presence of my King, particularly when they relate to my office."

"Oh, indeed, monsieur!" said Chicot. "How different you are from us courtiers! Why, we are still laughing at the last piece of buffoonery."

"And what may this piece of buffoonery be?" asked Monsoreau.

"Making you grand huntsman; you see, then, that this dear Harry of mine, though inferior to me as a buffoon, is far a greater fool than I am."

The glance Monsoreau flashed at the Gascon was terrible.

"Come, come," said Henri, who dreaded a quarrel, "let us talk of something else, gentlemen."

"Yes," returned Chicot, "let us speak of the merits of Our Lady of Chartres."

"Chicot, no impiety," said the King, severely.

"I impious. I?" said Chicot. "I leave impiety to the men of the church; I am a man of war. On the contrary, I was going to show you it is you who have acted impiously."

"How?"

"By not uniting the two chemises, instead of separating them. If I were in your place, Henri, I should have brought

them together, and then there would have been some chance of a miracle."

This rather coarse allusion to the separation of the King and Queen occasioned a fit of merriment among the King's friends, in which Henri himself joined after a time.

"For once the fool is right enough," said he.

And he changed the conversation.

"Monsieur," said Monsoreau, in a low voice to Chicot, "may I ask you to wait for me in the recess of that window, acting as if nothing was the matter?"

"Why, of course, monsieur!" answered Chicot, "with the greatest pleasure."

"Well, then, let us draw our" —

"Let us draw anywhere you like, monsieur, in some lonely spot in a wood, if that suit you."

"No more jests, if you please; they are useless, for there is no one here to laugh at them," said Monsoreau, coming up to Chicot, who had gone before him to the window. "Now that we are alone, we must have an understanding, Monsieur Chicot, Monsieur the Fool, Monsieur the Buffoon. A gentleman — try and understand the meaning of that word — a gentleman forbids you to laugh at him; he also requests you to reflect seriously before you make any arrangements for meetings in woods; for in the woods to which you have just invited me there grow plenty of cudgels and other such things; so you see it would be very easy to complete M. de Mayenne's work by giving you another thrashing."

"Ah!" returned Chicot, apparently unmoved, although there was a sombre gleam in his dark eyes. "You remind me of all I owe M. de Mayenne; so you would wish me to become your debtor as I am his, to write you down on the same sheet in my memory, and reserve for you an equal share in my gratitude?"

"It would seem, monsieur, that among your creditors you forget the chief one."

"That surprises me, monsieur, for I am rather proud of my memory. Will you allow me to ask you who is this creditor?"

"Maitre Nicolas David."

"Oh, I assure you you are wrong," answered Chicot, with a sinister laugh. "I owe him nothing, he is paid in full."

At this moment, a third gentleman came to take part in the conversation.

It was Bussy.

"Ah! M. de Bussy," said Chicot, "give me a little help, if you please. M. de Monsoreau, as you see, has tracked me; he would hunt me as if I were nothing more or less than a stag or roebuck. Tell him he is entirely in error, M. de Bussy; tell him he has to do with a boar, and that the boar sometimes turns on the hunter."

"M. de Chicot," said Bussy, "I believe you are not doing justice to M. de Monsoreau in thinking that he does not credit you to be what you are, namely, a gentleman of good family. Monsieur," continued Bussy, addressing the count, "I have the honor to inform you that M. le Duc d'Anjou desires to speak with you."

"With me?" inquired Monsoreau, uneasily.

"With you, monsieur," said Bussy.

Monsoreau looked intently at him as if he would sound the very depths of his soul, but the serene smile and steady eyes of Bussy baffled his penetration.

"Do you accompany me, monsieur?" asked Monsoreau.

"No, monsieur, I go before you, while you are taking leave of the King, to apprise his highness that you are about to obey his orders."

And Bussy returned as he came, gliding with his usual address through the throng of courtiers.

The Duc d'Anjou was in his study, reading for the second time the letter with which our readers are already acquainted. Hearing the rustling of the hangings, he thought it was Monsoreau who was entering, and hid the letter.

Bussy appeared.

"Well?" said the duke.

"Well, monseigneur, he is coming."

"Does he suspect anything?"

"And what if he did? what though he were on his guard?" answered Bussy. "Is he not your creature? Have you not raised him from obscurity? Can you not plunge him back into the obscurity from which you have raised him?"

"I suppose so," said the duke, with that absent-minded air which always distinguished him at the approach of events calling for the display of some energy.

"Do you think him less guilty to-day than you thought him yesterday?"

"No, a hundred times more : his crimes are of the class that grow larger the more you reflect upon them."

"Besides," said Bussy, "everything centres in this one point : he has treacherously carried off a young girl of noble birth and has forced her to marry him, using means that were fraudulent and utterly unworthy of a gentleman for the purpose ; either he must ask for the dissolution of this marriage himself, or you must do it for him."

"That is my determination."

"And in the name of the father, in the name of the young girl, in the name of Diane, I have your word ?"

"You have."

"Remember that they are aware of your interview with this man, and how anxiously they await its result."

"The young girl shall be free, Bussy ; I pledge you my word."

"Ah !" cried Bussy, "if you do that, you will be really a great prince, monseigneur."

He took the duke's hand, that hand that had signed so many false promises, the hand of that man who had broken so many sworn oaths, and kissed it respectfully.

At this moment steps were heard in the vestibule.

"He is here," said Bussy.

"Show M. de Monsoreau in," said François, in a tone whose severity was of good omen to Bussy.

At last the young gentleman was almost certain of achieving the object of all his desires, and, as he bowed to Monsoreau, he could not hinder a slight expression of haughty irony from coming into his eyes ; on the other hand, the grand huntsman received the salutation of Bussy with that glassy look behind which, as behind an impassable rampart, were intrenched the sentiments of his soul.

Bussy took his place in the corridor with which we are already acquainted, the same corridor in which La Mole was very nearly being strangled one night by Charles XI., Henri III., the Duc d'Alençon, and the Duc de Guise, with the cordelier's cord of the queen mother. This corridor, as well as the adjoining landing, was at present packed with gentlemen who had come to pay their court to the Duc d'Anjou.

When Bussy appeared every one hastened to make way for him, as much from esteem for his personal qualities as on account of the favor he enjoyed with the prince. He himself

kept a tight hand over all his feelings, and never for a moment did he disclose a symptom of the terrible anguish that was concentrated in his breast while he awaited the result of a conference upon which all his happiness was staked.

The conversation could not fail to be animated; Bussy had seen enough of Monsoreau to understand that he would not let himself be ruined without a struggle. But, for all that, the Duc d'Anjou had but to press a hand on him, and if he refused to bend, well! he must break.

Suddenly the well-known echo of the prince's voice was heard. The voice was the voice of command.

Bussy started with joy.

"Ah!" said he, "the duke is keeping his word."

But to this echo there succeeded another. A profound silence reigned among the courtiers, who exchanged anxious glances.

Uneasy and nervous, borne along, now by the tide of hope, driven back again by the ebb of fear, Bussy reckoned every minute of the time that elapsed for nearly a quarter of an hour.

Then the door of the duke's chamber was suddenly opened, and through the hangings were heard voices apparently speaking in a cheerful conversational tone.

Bussy knew the duke was alone with the grand huntsman, and, if their conversation had followed its opening course, it should be anything but pleasant at the present moment.

This evidence of reconciliation made him shudder.

Soon the voices came nearer, the hangings were raised. Monsoreau bowed himself out, walking backward. The duke followed him to the door, saying:

"Adieu, my friend, the thing is settled."

"My friend!" murmured Bussy, "God's blood! what does this mean?"

"So, monseigneur," said Monsoreau, his face still turned to the prince, "it is your highness's firm opinion that the best way out of the difficulty is publicity?"

"Yes, yes," answered the duke; "these mysteries are all nonsense."

"Then this evening," said the grand huntsman, "I will present her to the King."

"Do not fear to do so, I will have everything arranged."

The duke leaned forward and whispered some words in the grand huntsman's ear.

"Very well, monseigneur," answered the latter.

Monsoreau made his last bow to the prince, who glanced round at the gentlemen present, but did not see Bussy, hidden as he was by the folds of a curtain which he had clutched at to save himself from falling.

"Gentlemen," said Monsoreau, turning to the courtiers, who were waiting for an audience and were already inclined to hail the rise of a new favorite apparently destined to throw Bussy into the shade, "gentlemen, allow me to announce to you a piece of news. Monseigneur permits me to make public my marriage with Mademoiselle Diane de Méridor, my wife for over a month, and to present her at court this evening under his auspices."

Bussy staggered; although the blow was not entirely unexpected, it was so violent that he felt utterly crushed.

Then he advanced, and he and the duke, both pale, but for very different reasons, exchanged glances of contempt on Bussy's part, of terror on the part of the Due d'Anjou.

Monsoreau forced his way through the throng of gentlemen; amid all sorts of compliments and congratulations.

As for Bussy, he made a movement as if to approach the prince, who saw it, dropped the hangings, and shut the door behind them; the key could then be heard turning in the lock.

Bussy felt the blood surging, warm and tumultuous, to his temples and to his heart. His hand coming in contact with the dagger in his belt, he half drew it from its sheath, for, with this man, the first outburst of passion was almost irresistible. But the love which had driven him to this violence paralyzed all his fiery energies; a sorrow, bitter, profound, piercing, stifled his rage; instead of expanding his heart, it broke it.

Before this paroxysm of two contending passions, the young man's energy sank, as sink two angry billows that seem to wish to scale the heavens when they dash together at the strongest point of their ascension.

Feeling that if he remained a moment longer he should betray before every one the violence of his despair, Bussy moved through the corridor, reached the private staircase, descended through a postern into the courtyard of the Louvre, leaped on his horse, and galloped to the Rue Saint-Antoine.

The baron and Diane were eagerly waiting for the answer

promised by Bussy; they saw the young man enter, pale, trembling, with bloodshot eyes.

"Madame," cried Bussy, "hate me, despise me; I believed I was something in this world, and I am but an atom; I believed I could do something, and I cannot even tear out my heart. Madame, you are indeed the wife of M. de Monsoreau, his recognized wife, and are to be presented this evening. But I am a poor fool, a wretched madman, or rather, ah! yes, the Duc d'Anjou is, as you said, M. le Baron, a coward and a scoundrel."

And leaving the father and the daughter overcome with dismay, Bussy, wild with grief, drunk with rage, rushed downstairs, leaped on his steed, plunged the rowels deep in its sides, and, unknowing where he went, dropping the reins, all his care to repress the wild pulsations of his heart, throbbing under his nerveless hand, he rode onward, scattering terror and desolation on his pathway.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHAT PASSED BETWEEN THE DUC D'ANJOU AND THE GRAND HUNTSMAN.

It is time to explain the sudden change wrought in the Duc d'Anjou's attitude toward Bussy.

When the duke received M. de Monsoreau, in compliance with the urgent entreaty of his gentleman, he was resolute in his determination to aid in achieving the latter's purpose. His bile was easily stirred up, and gushed, on small provocation, from a heart ulcerated by two dominant passions: wounded self-love and the exposure threatened by Bussy in the name of the Baron de Méridor had made François fairly foam with rage.

The outburst produced by the combination of two such sentiments is, in fact, appalling, when the heart that contains them is so solidly sheathed, so hermetically closed, that, as in the case of bombs crammed with gunpowder, the pressure doubles the intensity of the explosion.

The prince, then, received the grand huntsman with one of

those austere looks that made the boldest of the courtiers tremble, for well they knew what means he had ready at hand to execute his vengeance.

"Your highness sent for me?" said Monsoreau, with an air of great calmness, his eyes fixed on the tapestry. Accustomed as he was to work upon the prince's soul, he knew what a fire smouldered under this seeming coldness, and he gazed at the hangings as if he were asking an explanation of their owner's intentions from these inanimate objects rather than from the owner himself.

"Do not be afraid, monsieur," said the duke, who divined his suspicions, "there is no one behind these hangings; we can talk freely and, best of all, frankly."

Monsoreau bowed.

"You are a good servant, M. le Grand Veneur, and devoted to my person, are you not?"

"I believe so, monseigneur."

"And I am sure of it; you have often warned me of the plots concocted against me and have aided me in my enterprises, forgetful of your own interests and at the risk of your own life."

"Your highness" —

"Oh, I am well aware of the fact. Even lately — I must really remind you of the services you have rendered me, for such is the delicacy of your nature that you never, even indirectly, allude to them — even in that late unhappy adventure" —

"What adventure, monsieigneur?"

"The abduction of Mademoiselle de Méridor — poor young lady!"

"Alas!" murmured Monsoreau, but in a tone that left it in doubt whether he gave to the words of François their implied meaning.

"You pity her, do you not?" said the prince, pointedly.

"Does your highness not pity her?"

"I? Ah, you know how deeply I have regretted that fatal caprice! Nay, nothing but the friendship I feel for you, nothing but the recollection of your loyal service, could make me forget that, but for you, I should never have carried off that young girl."

The stroke told. "I wonder," thought Monsoreau, "is this simply remorse?"

"Monseigneur," he said aloud, "the natural goodness of your disposition leads you to exaggerate the matter; you had no more to do with this young girl's death than I had" —

"How can you show that?"

"Surely it was not your intention to offer violence to Mademoiselle de Méridor?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then the intention absolves you, monseigneur; it was merely one of those unfortunate accidents we see occurring every day."

"And besides," said the duke, eyeing him intently, "death has buried everything in eternal silence!"

There was something in the tone of the prince's voice that forced Monsoreau to raise his eyes. "This," he said to himself, "cannot be remorse." Then:

"Monseigneur," he answered, "shall I speak frankly to you?"

"Why should you hesitate to do so?" said the prince, with a mixture of astonishment and hauteur.

"Really, I see no reason why I should."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, monseigneur, I mean that, henceforth, frankness ought to be the principal element in this conversation, considering that I am speaking to a prince noted for his intelligence and magnanimity."

"Henceforth? What does this signify?"

"It signifies that your highness has not thought proper, so far, to use that frankness toward me."

"Upon my word!" answered the duke, with a burst of laughter that betrayed his furious anger.

"Hear me," said Monsoreau, humbly, "I know what your highness intended to say to me."

"Speak, then."

"Your highness intended to say that perhaps Mademoiselle de Méridor was not dead and that those who believed themselves her murderers had no reason to feel remorse."

"Oh, monsieur, what a time it has taken you to impart this soothing consolation to me. You are a faithful servant, there can be no doubt about it! You saw me gloomy and dispirited; I told you of the dismal dreams I have had ever since this woman's death, although, Heaven knows, I am not a very sensitive person, and yet you let me live thus, when even a

doubt might have spared me so much suffering. What am I to call such conduct as that, monsieur ? ”

The intensity with which the duke uttered these words proved that his fury could not be restrained much longer.

“ Monseigneur,” replied Monsoreau, “ it looks as if your highness were bringing a charge against me.”

“ Traitor ! ” cried the duke, abruptly, making a step toward the grand huntsman, “ I bring it and I ’ll prove it. You have deceived me ! You have taken from me the woman I loved ! ”

Monsoreau turned frightfully pale, but remained as calm and proud as ever.

“ It is true,” said he.

“ Ah ! it is true ! — the scoundrel ! the knave ! ”

“ Have the goodness to speak lower, monseigneur,” said Monsoreau, with the same coolness. “ Your highness seems to forget that you are speaking to a gentleman, as well as to a good servant.”

The duke laughed convulsively.

“ A good servant of the King,” continued Monsoreau, still unmoved.

The duke was startled by the last words.

“ What do you mean ? ” he muttered.

“ I mean,” returned Monsoreau, with obsequious gentleness, “ that should your highness deign to listen to me I might be able to convince you that, since you wanted to take this woman, there was no reason why I should not take her also.”

The duke was so astounded at the grand huntsman’s audacity that, for the moment, he was unable to utter a word.

“ My excuse is,” continued Monsoreau, “ that I loved Made-moiselle de Méridor ardently.”

“ But I, too, loved her ! ” answered François, with dignity.

“ Of course, monseigneur, you are my master ; but Made-moiselle de Méridor did not love you ? ”

“ And she loved you ? — you ? ”

“ Perhaps,” murmured Monsoreau.

“ You lie ! you lie ! You used force as I did ; only I, the master, failed, while you, the lackey, succeeded. I could, indeed, employ power, but you could employ treachery.”

“ Monseigneur, I loved her.”

“ What is that to me ? ”

“ Monseigneur ” —

“ What ! threats, serpent ? ”

"Monseigneur, take care!" said Monsoreau, lowering his head, like a tiger about to spring. "I loved her, I tell you, and I am not one of your lackeys, as you have just said. My wife is mine as much as my lands are mine; no one can take her from me, not even the King. I wished to have this woman and I took her."

"Indeed!" exclaimed François, springing toward a silver bell on the table; "you took her, did you? Well, you shall give her up!"

"You are mistaken, monseigneur," said Monsoreau, hurrying to the table to prevent the prince from ringing. "Banish from your mind the evil thought of injuring me that has just entered it, for, if you once called, if you once offered me a public insult" —

"You shall give up this woman, I tell you."

"Give her up! how? She is my wife before God."

Monsoreau expected this declaration to be effective, but it did not mollify the duke's anger in the least.

"If she is your wife before God, you shall give her up before men!" said he.

"Does he know anything, I wonder?" murmured Monsoreau, unguardedly.

"Yes, I know everything. You shall break this marriage. I will break it, though you were bound by it before all the Gods that ever reigned in Heaven."

"Ah! monseigneur, you are blaspheming," said Monsoreau.

"To-morrow Mademoiselle de Méridor shall be restored to her father; to-morrow you shall be on your way to the exile to which I condemn you, and in an hour you shall have sold your post as grand huntsman. These are my orders; refuse to obey them, vassal, and I break you as I break this glass."

And the prince, seizing an enamelled crystal goblet, a present from the Archduke of Austria, hurled it furiously at Monsoreau, who was covered with its fragments.

"I will not give up my wife, I will not resign my office, and I will remain in France," retorted Monsoreau, marching up to the amazed François.

"Why not — wretch?"

"Because I will ask the King of France to pardon me — the King elected in the Abbey of St. Geneviève, and because this new sovereign, so gracious and noble, so favored by God,

and that, too, so recently, will not refuse to listen to the first suppliant who sues him for a boon."

The words of Monsoreau became more emphatic as he went on, until the fire in his eyes seemed to pass into his voice, rendering the terrible import of his language more terrible still.

François turned pale, took a step backward, and drew the heavy hangings over the door closer together; then, grasping Monsoreau's hand, he said, jerking out his words, as if the strain had been too much for him:

"Enough — not another word of that, count. This boon — ask it — but speak lower — I am listening."

"I will speak humbly," answered Monsoreau, all his coolness at once restored, "as becomes your highness's most humble servant."

François walked slowly round the vast apartment, and every time he came near the tapestries he looked behind them. Apparently, he could scarcely believe that Monsoreau's words had not been heard.

"You were saying?" he asked.

"I was saying, monseigneur, that a fatal love was the cause of all. Love, monseigneur, is the most imperious of passions. I could never have forgotten that your highness had cast eyes on Diane, had I been master of myself."

"I told you, count, it was a treacherous thing to do."

"Do not overwhelm me, monseigneur, and listen to the idea that came into my mind. I saw you rich, young, and happy, the first prince in the Christian world."

The duke started.

"For such you are," whispered Monsoreau in the duke's ear; "between you and the throne there is but a shadow, a shadow easily banished. I saw all the splendor of your future, and, comparing your magnificent fortune with my paltry aspirations, dazzled by the effulgent brightness that was some day to shine around you and almost hide from your eyes the poor little flower I coveted, — I so insignificant beside my illustrious master, — I said to myself: 'Leave to the prince his brilliant dreams, his glorious projects; there is his goal; mine must be sought in obscurity. He will hardly miss the tiny pearl I steal from his royal crown.'"

"Count! Count!" said the duke, intoxicated, in spite of himself, by the charms of this magic picture.

"You pardon me, do you not, monseigneur?"

At this moment the prince raised his eyes and they met Bussy's portrait, framed in gilt leather, on the wall. He liked to look at it sometimes, just as he had of yore liked to look on the portrait of La Mole. There was such a haughty expression in the look, such loftiness in the mien, and the hand rested on the hip in an attitude of such superb grace that the duke almost fancied it was Bussy himself with his flashing eyes — Bussy ready to step forth from the wall and bid him have courage.

"No," said he, "I cannot pardon you. If I am obdurate, God is my witness that it is not on account of myself: it is because a father in mourning — a father shamefully deceived — cries out for his daughter; it is because a woman, forced to marry you, invokes vengeance on your head; it is, in a word, because the first duty of a prince is justice."

"Monseigneur!"

"Yes, I tell you, the first duty of a prince is justice, and I must do justice!"

"If justice be the first duty of a prince," said Monsoreau, "gratitude is the first duty of a king."

"What is that you say?"

"I say a king ought never to forget the man to whom he owes his crown — now, monseigneur" —

"Well?"

"You owe me your crown, sire!"

"Monsoreau!" cried the duke, more terrified now than ever when the grand huntsman first uttered his warning menace. "Monsoreau!" he repeated, in a low and trembling voice, "are you a traitor to the king as you were to the prince?"

"I am loyal to him who is loyal to me, sire," answered Monsoreau in tones that grew louder and louder.

"Wretch!"

And the duke again looked at the portrait of Bussy.

"I cannot!" said he. "You are a loyal gentleman, Monsoreau; you must understand I cannot approve of what you have done."

"Why so, monseigneur?"

"Because it was an act unworthy of you and of me — renounce this woman — ah! my dear count, another sacrifice — rest assured that, to reward you for it, there is nothing you can ask which I will not grant."

"Then your highness is still in love with Diane de Méridor?" asked Monsoreau, livid with jealousy.

"No! No! I swear I am not!"

"Then who is it has attempted to influence your highness? She is my wife; am I not a well-born gentleman? Can any one have dared to interfere in my private affairs?"

"But she does not love you."

"What affair is that of any one?"

"Do this for my sake, Monsoreau."

"I cannot."

"Then" — said the duke, in a state of the most horrible perplexity — "then" —

"Reflect, *sire*."

The prince wiped off from his forehead the perspiration brought there by the title the count had just uttered.

"You would denounce me?"

"To the King you dethroned? Yes, your Majesty; for if my new sovereign injured me in my honor or happiness, I would go back to the old one."

"It is infamous!"

"It is true, sire; but I am enough in love to descend to infamy even."

"It is base!"

"Yes, your majesty; but I am enough in love to descend to baseness."

The duke made a movement toward Monsoreau. But the latter, with a single look, a single smile, brought him to a standstill.

"You would gain nothing by killing me, monseigneur," he said, "there are certain secrets which float above the corpse! Let us remain as we are, you the most element of kings, I the humblest of your subjects!"

The duke clasped his hands and tore them with his fingernails.

"Come, come, my gracious lord, do something for the man who has served you so well in everything."

François rose.

"What do you want?" said he.

"I want your majesty to" —

"Oh! wretched man! must I then entreat you not to" —

"Oh! monseigneur!"

And Monsoreau bowed.

"Speak," murmured François.

"You pardon me, monseigneur?"

"Yes."

"You will reconcile me with M. de Méridor, monseigneur?"

"Yes."

"You will sign my marriage contract with Mademoiselle de Méridor, monseigneur?"

"Yes," answered the duke, in a stifled voice.

"And you will honor my wife with a smile on the day when she appears formally in the circle of the Queen, to whom I wish to have the honor of presenting her?"

"Yes," said François; "is that all?"

"Yes, monseigneur, absolutely all."

"Go; you have my word."

"And you," said Monsoreau, approaching the duke's ear, "shall keep the throne to which I have raised you. Adieu, sire."

This time his words were so low that they sounded pleasantly in the prince's ears.

"And now," thought Monsoreau, "to discover how the duke has found it out."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOW THE CHANCELLOR UNVEILED A CONSPIRACY.

THAT same evening, M. de Monsoreau secured one of the objects for the achievement of which he had insisted on the Duc d'Anjou's intervention: he presented his wife in the Queen's circle and in that of the queen mother also.

Henri, tired out as usual, had gone to bed, after being informed by M. de Morvilliers that he must hold a council the next morning.

Henri did not even ask the chancellor why such a council should assemble; his Majesty was too sleepy. The hour was afterward fixed on which would be least likely to disturb the slumbers and repose of the sovereign.

This magistrate knew his master perfectly, and was fully aware that, unlike Philip of Macedon, his King would pay but slight attention to his communications if he had to listen to them when dozing or fasting.

He also knew that Henri was subject to insomnia—it is the lot of those who have to watch over the sleep of others not to sleep themselves—and would be sure, sometime in the middle of the night, to remember the audience asked for; he would, therefore, grant it under the spur of a curiosity proportioned to the situation.

Everything passed as M. de Morvilliers had foreseen.

Henri woke after sleeping three or four hours; recalling to mind the chancellor's request, he sat up and began to think. But thinking alone he found rather tedious; he slipped out of bed, put on his silk drawers and slippers, and making no further change in his night costume,—which gave him the appearance of a spectre,—he made his way by the light of his lamp—never extinguished since the night when the voice of the Eternal rang in his ears through the air-cane of Madame de Saint-Luc—to Chicot's bedroom. Now the jester's bedroom was at present the one in which Mademoiselle de Bris-sac had so happily celebrated her wedding-night.

The Gascon was sleeping soundly and snoring like a forge.

Henri pulled him three times by the arm without awaking him.

But, after the third time, the King shouted so loud that Chicot opened an eye.

“Chicot!” repeated the King.

“What is the matter now?” asked the Gascon.

“Ah! my friend, can you sleep thus when your King finds sleep impossible?”

“Good heavens!” cried Chicot, pretending not to recognize the King, “is it possible, then, that his Majesty has a fit of indigestion?”

“Chicot, my friend,” said Henri, “it is I!”

“You; who?”

“I, Henri.”

“Decidedly, my son, the pheasants disagreed with you; I warned you at supper, but you would eat so much of them, as well as of that crawfish soup.”

“No,” answered Henri, “I hardly tasted either.”

“Then some one has poisoned you. *Ventre de biche!* how pale you look, Henri!”

“It is my mask, my friend,” said the King.

“You are not sick, then?”

“No.”

"Then why do you wake me?"

"Because I am terribly worried."

"You are worried, are you?"

"Yes, greatly."

"So much the better."

"Why so much the better?"

"Because trouble brings reflection, and you will reflect that you have no right to wake an honest man at two in the morning except you are going to make him a present. What have you for me? Show me."

"Nothing, Chicot. I have come to talk with you."

"That is not enough."

"Chicot, M. de Morvilliers came to court last night."

"You receive very bad company, Henri. What did he come for?"

"To ask me for an audience."

"Ah! there is a man who has some little breeding; he is not like you, Henri, coming into people's bedrooms at two in the morning without as much as saying by your leave."

"But what could he have to say to me, Chicot?"

"What! was it to ask that you woke me up?"

"Chicot, my friend, you know that M. de Morvilliers has something to do with my police."

"No, faith, I knew nothing about it."

"Chicot, I find that M. de Morvilliers is always remarkably well informed."

"And to think," cried the Gascon, "that I might now be asleep, instead of listening to such nonsense."

"Have you any doubt as to the chancellor's watchfulness?" asked the King.

"Yes, *corbeauf*, I have, and I have my reasons for it, too."

"What are they?"

"If I give you one, will that be enough?"

"Yes, if it is a good one."

"And you will leave me in peace afterward?"

"Certainly."

"Well, one day — no, it was one evening" —

"That does not matter."

"On the contrary, it matters a great deal — Well, one evening I beat you in the Rue Fromental; Quélus and Schomberg were with you."

"You beat me?"

"Yes, cudgelled you; cudgelled you all three."

"And why?"

"You had insulted my page. You received the blows, then, and M. de Morvilliers never said a word about them."

"What!" cried Henri, "it was you, you scoundrel! you sacrilegious wretch!"

"Myself and none other," said Chicot, rubbing his hands. "Don't you think, my son, I hit pretty hard when I set about it?"

"Scoundrel!"

"You acknowledge then that what I say is true?"

"I will have you whipped, Chicot."

"That is not the question. All I ask you is to say whether it is true or not."

"You know well it is true, you rascal!"

"And did you send for M. de Morvilliers the next day?"

"Yes, you were present when he came."

"And you told him of the grievous accident that had happened to one of your friends?"

"Yes."

"And you ordered him to find the criminal?"

"Yes."

"Did he find him for you?"

"No."

"Well, go to bed, Henri; you see your police is n't worth much."

And turning to the wall, refusing to answer a single word, Chicot was soon snoring again with a loudness that resembled the booming of cannon. The King gave up in despair all hope of rousing him from his second sleep.

Henri returned to his room, sighing on the way, and having no one to converse with but his greyhound Narcisse, he bewailed to the latter the misfortune of kings who can never learn the truth except at their own expense.

The next day the council assembled. The composition of this council varied with the changing friendships of the King. The members this time were Quélus, Maugiron, D'Épernon, and Schomberg, these four having been the favorites for over six months.

Chicot, seated at the head of the table, was cutting out paper boats and arranging them in line; he wanted, he said,

to create a fleet for his Most Christian Majesty fully equal to that of his Most Catholic Majesty.

M. de Morvilliers was announced.

The statesman had assumed his most sombre garb and his most lugubrious air for the occasion. After a profound salutation, which was returned by Chicot, he approached the King.

"I am," said he, "in presence of your Majesty's council?"

"Yes, in presence of my best friends. Speak."

"Then, sire, I take courage, and I have need of all my courage, for I have a terrible plot to denounce to your Majesty."

"A plot!" cried all.

Chicot pricked up his ears and suspended the construction of a splendid two-masted galiot which he intended making the flagship of his fleet.

"Yes, your Majesty, a plot," said M. de Morvilliers, in the mysterious, half-suppressed tones that forebode a terrible revelation.

"Oh!" cried the King, "a Spanish plot, is it?"

At this moment the Duc d'Anjou entered the hall, the doors of which were immediately closed.

"Have you heard, brother?" cried Henri. "M. de Morvilliers has just informed us of a plot against the safety of the state."

The duke's eyes moved slowly round the hall with that piercing, suspicious look we know so well.

"Is it really possible," he murmured.

"Alas! yes, monseigneur," said M. de Morvilliers, "a most dangerous plot."

"Tell us all about it," replied Chicot, putting his completed galiot in the crystal basin on the table.

"Yes," stammered the Duc d'Anjou, "tell us all about it, M. le Chancelier."

"I am listening," said Henri.

The chancellor spoke in his most guarded tone, assuming his humblest attitude, showing in his eyes the importance he attached to his information.

"Sire," said he, "I have had some malecontents under surveillance for a long time" —

"Oh! only some?" interrupted Chicot. "Why, you are quite modest, M. de Morvilliers!"

"They were," continued the chancellor, "people of no im-

portance: shopkeepers, mechanics, or junior law-clerks — with here and there a few monks and students."

"Certainly such fellows as those are not very great princes," said Chicot, with the greatest unconcern, setting to work on a new vessel.

The Duc d'Anjou tried to force a smile.

"You will see, sire," said the chancellor. "I know that malcontents always find their opportunities in war or religion."

"A very judicious remark," observed the King. "Continue."

The chancellor, delighted at the royal approbation, went on:

"In the army I had officers devoted to your Majesty who informed me of everything: in religion the affair was more difficult: so with regard to the latter I set some of my men on the watch."

"Very judicious, indeed!" said Chicot.

"In short," continued Morvilliers, "through my agents I persuaded a man connected with the provostship of Paris" —

"To do what?" inquired the King.

"To keep the preachers who excite the people against your Majesty under his eyes."

"Oho!" thought Chicot. "I wonder is my friend known?"

"These people received their inspiration, sire, not from God, but from a party hostile to your Majesty, and this party I have studied."

"Very good," said the King.

"Very judicious," said Chicot.

"And I know their purposes," added Morvilliers, triumphantly.

"Splendid!" cried Chicot.

The King made a sign to the Gascon to be silent.

The Duc d'Anjou never took his eyes off the speaker.

"For more than two months," said the chancellor, "I have had in my pay men of much skill, of tried courage, and also, it must be said, insatiable cupidity; but I have been careful to turn that to the profit of the King, since, though I pay them magnificently, a great deal more is gained than lost. I have just learned that for a good round sum of money I shall be able to learn the chief rendezvous of the conspirators."

"That will be really nice," said Chicot; "pay it, my King, pay it!"

"Oh, there will be no difficulty about the payment," cried

Henri ; "but, to come to the main point, chancellor, what is the object of the plot, and what do the conspirators hope for ?"

"Sire, they are thinking of nothing less than of a second Saint-Barthélemy."

"Against whom ?"

"Against the Huguenots."

All the members of the council looked at one another in amazement.

"And about how much did that cost you ?" asked Chicot.

"Seventy-five thousand livres in one direction, and a hundred thousand in the other."

Chicot turned to the King.

"If you like," said he, "I'll tell you M. de Morvilliers' secret for a thousand crowns."

The chancellor made a gesture of surprise ; the Duc d'Anjou bore up better than might have been expected.

"Tell it to me," answered the King.

"It is simply the League which was begun ten years ago," said Chicot. "M. de Morvilliers has discovered what every Parisian knows as well as the Lord's Prayer" —

"Monsieur," interrupted the chancellor.

"I am saying the truth — and will prove it," cried Chicot, in a very lawyer-like tone.

"Tell me, then, the place where the Leaguers meet."

"With great pleasure : firstly, the public squares ; secondly, the public squares ; thirdly, the public squares."

"M. Chicot likes to make a joke," said the chancellor, with a grimace ; "and now will he tell us their rallying sign ?"

"They dress like Parisians, and stir their legs when they walk," answered Chicot, gravely.

A burst of laughter received this explanation, in which M. de Morvilliers believed it would be in good taste to join, so he laughed with the others. But he soon became serious and solemn again.

"There is one meeting, however," said he, "which a spy of mine witnessed, and it was held in a place of which M. Chicot is ignorant."

The Duc d'Anjou turned pale.

"Where ?" said the King.

"In the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève."

Chicot dropped a paper he was about putting aboard the flagship.

"The Abbey of Sainte Geneviève!" exclaimed the King.

"It is impossible," murmured the duke.

"It is true," said Morvilliers, well satisfied at the effect produced, and looking triumphantly round the assembly.

"And what did they do, M. le Chancelier? What decision did they come to?" asked the King.

"That the Leaguers should choose their leaders, that every one enrolled should arm, that every province should receive an envoy from the rebellious capital, and that all the Huguenots, so dear to his Majesty, — these were their expressions," —

The King smiled.

"— should be massacred on a given day."

"Is that all?" inquired Henri.

"Odsfish!" said Chicot, "it's easy seeing you are a Catholic, Henri."

"Is that really all?" said the duke.

"Hang it! it can't be all," cried Chicot. "If that's all we're to have for our one hundred and seventy-five thousand livres, the King is robbed."

"Speak, chancellor," said the King.

"There are leaders" —

Chicot could see how fast the duke's heart must be beating from the rising and sinking of the part of his doublet over it.

"Ah, indeed!" said the Gascon, "a conspiracy with leaders! How wonderful! Still I can't help thinking we ought to have something more than that for our one hundred and seventy-five thousand livres."

"But their names?" asked the King. "How are these leaders called?"

"First, a preacher, a fanatic, a madman, whose name I got for ten thousand livres."

"And you did well."

"Brother Gorenflot, a monk of Sainte Geneviève."

"Poor devil!" murmured Chicot, with genuine pity. "It was fated that this adventure should not turn out well for him!"

"Gorenflot!" said the King, writing down the name. "And who is the next?"

"Next" — said the chancellor, hesitatingly; "yes, sire — that is all." And Morvilliers cast an inquisitorial and enigmatical look over the assembly, as much as to say:

“If your Majesty and I were alone, you would hear a good deal more.”

“Speak,” said the King; “there are none but friends here, speak.”

“Oh, sire, he whom I hesitate to name has also powerful friends.”

“Are they close to me?”

“They are everywhere, sire.”

“Are they more powerful than I?” cried Henri, pale with rage and anxiety.

“Sire, a secret is not spoken aloud in public. Excuse me, but I am a statesman.”

“You are right.”

“And very judicious!” said Chicot; “but, for that matter, we are all statesmen.”

“Monsieur,” said the Duc d’Anjou, “we beg to present our most humble respects to the King and withdraw, if your communication cannot be made in our presence.”

M. Morvilliers hesitated. Chicot watched his slightest gesture, fearing that, artless as the chancellor seemed, he had succeeded in discovering something less commonplace than the matters mentioned in his first revelations.

The King made a sign to the chancellor to come close to him, to the Duc d’Anjou to remain in his place, to Chicot to keep still, and to the others to try to avoid hearing the chancellor’s report,

M. de Morvilliers bent over the King to whisper in his ear, but had succeeded in making only half the movement required by the rules of etiquette in such cases, when a great clamor was heard in the court-yard of the Louvre. The King sprang to his feet, Quélus and D’Épernon hurried to the window, and the Duc d’Anjou grasped the hilt of his sword, as if these threatening shouts were directed against him.

Chicot, rising up to his full length, was able to see into the yard, and called out:

“Why, it is M. de Guise entering the Louvre!”

The King gave a start.

“It is true,” said the gentlemen.

“The Duc de Guise!” stammered M. d’Anjou.

“This is very odd, is it not, very odd that M. de Guise should be in Paris?” slowly observed the King, who had just read in the almost stupefied eyes of Morvilliers the name the latter desired to whisper in his ear.

"Had the communication you were about to make to me anything to do with my cousin Guise?" he asked the chancellor in a low tone.

"Yes, sire," said the magistratè, in the same tone. "It was he who presided at the meeting."

"And the others?"

"I do not know the others."

Henri consulted Chicot by a glance.

"*Ventre de biche!*" cried the Gascon, taking a regal attitude, "show my cousin of Guise in!"

And, leaning toward Henri, he whispered:

"You need not write his name on your tablets; there is no danger of your forgetting it."

The ushers noisily opened the doors.

"Only a single folding-door, gentlemen," said Henri; "only one! The two are for the King."

The Duc de Guise was near enough to hear these words; but they made no change in the smile with which he had determined to greet the King.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHAT M. DE GUISE CAME TO DO IN THE LOUVRE.

BEHIND M. de Guise entered a great number of officers, courtiers, and gentlemen, and behind this brilliant escort was the people, an escort not so brilliant, but more reliable, and, certainly, more formidable.

But the gentlemen entered the palace and the people stayed at the gates.

It was from the ranks of the people that the cries arose a second time, when the duke was lost to their gaze on going into the gallery.

At sight of the kind of army that followed the Parisian hero every time he appeared in the streets, the guards had seized their arms, and, drawn up behind their brave colonel, hurled at the people menacing looks, at the people's triumphant leader a mute defiance.

Guise had noticed the attitude of the soldiers commanded by Crillon; he made a gracious little salutation to their com-

mander ; but, sword in hand and standing four paces in front of his men, the colonel never abandoned his stiff, impassive attitude of disdainful inattention.

This revolt of a single man and a single regiment against his power, now so generally established, affected the duke strongly. His brow became for a moment clouded, but cleared as he drew near the King, so that, as we have seen, he entered Henri's cabinet with a smile on his lips.

"Ah! it is you, cousin," said the King. "What an uproar you bring in your train! Was there not a flourish of trumpets? I thought I heard them."

"Sire," answered the duke, "the trumpets sound in Paris only for the King, in campaigns only for the general, and I am too familiar with both courts and camps to make any mistake with reference to this matter. Here the trumpets would make too much noise for a subject; on the field of battle they would not make enough for a prince."

Henri bit his lips.

"*Par la mordieu!*" said he, after a silence, during which he eyed the Lorraine hero intently, "you are very splendidly garbed, cousin. Was it only to-day you arrived from the siege of La Charité?"

"Only to-day, sire," answered the duke, with a slight blush.

"By my faith, your visit does us much honor, cousin; much honor, much honor, indeed!"

Henri III. repeated his words when he had too many ideas to conceal, just as the ranks of soldiers are thickened before a battery not to be unmasked until a fixed moment.

"Much honor," repeated Chicot, in a tone that would lead any one to believe that these last two words had also been spoken by the King.

"Sire," said the duke, "your Majesty is no doubt jesting. How can my visit be an honor to him who is the source of all honor?"

"I mean, M. de Guise," replied Henri, "that every good Catholic, on returning from a campaign, is accustomed to visit God first in one of his temples; the King comes after God. Serve God, honor the King, is, you know, cousin, an axiom half religious, half political."

The heightened color on the duke's face now grew more distinct, and the King, who had, so far, kept his eyes riveted on

him, and so had remarked his change of color, happening to turn round, perceived with astonishment that his good brother was as pale as his fair cousin was red.

He was struck by the different effect produced by the emotion by which each was evidently excited, but he affected to turn away his eyes and assumed an air of great affability, the velvet glove under which nobody could hide his royal claws better than Henri.

"In any case, duke," said he, "nothing can equal my joy in seeing that you have escaped all the risks of war, although you sought danger, I have been told, in the rashest manner. But danger knows you, cousin, and avoids you."

The duke acknowledged the compliment by a bow.

"So, cousin, I must really entreat you not to be so eager for deadly perils, for, in truth, you put to shame idlers like us who simply eat and sleep, and hunt, and find our only triumphs in the invention of new fashions and new prayers."

"Yes, sire," said the duke, fastening on the last word. "We know you are an enlightened and pious prince, and that no pleasure can make you lose sight of the glory of God and the interests of the Church. And this is the reason why we approach your Majesty with such confidence."

"The confidence of your cousin in you must be evident, Henri," said Chicot, pointing to the gentlemen who remained just outside the room through respect; "see, he has left a third of his followers at the door of your cabinet, and the other two-thirds at the doors of the Louvre."

"With confidence?" repeated Henri. "Do you not always come to me with confidence, cousin?"

"Sire, that is a matter of course; but the confidence of which I speak refers to the proposition I am about to make to you."

"Ah, you have a proposition to make to me, cousin! Then you may speak with all the confidence to which you alluded. What is your proposition?"

"The execution of one of the finest ideas that ever moved the Christian world since the Crusades became impossible."

"Speak, duke."

"Sire," continued the duke, now raising his voice so as to be heard in the ante-chamber, "the title of Most Christian King is not a vain one; it exacts from him who bears it an ardent zeal for the defence of religion. The eldest son of the Church—

and that, sire, is your title — must always be ready to defend his mother.”

“Ha!” said Chicot, “this cousin of mine who preaches with a rapier by his side, and helm on head, is rather droll! I am no longer astonished that the monks want to make war. Henri, I insist that you give a regiment to Brother Gorenflot!”

The duke feigned not to hear; Henri crossed his legs, rested his elbow on his knee and his chin on his hand.

“Is the Church threatened by the Saracens, my dear duke?” he asked, “or can it be that you aspire to be king — of Jerusalem?”

“Sire,” returned the duke, “the great throng of people who followed me, blessing my name, honored me with this reception solely, I assure you, for the purpose of rewarding my ardent zeal in defending the faith. I have already had the honor of speaking to your Majesty, before your accession to the throne, of a plan for an alliance between all true Catholics.”

“Yes, yes,” said Chicot, “I remember the League; by Saint Bartholomew, I do. The League, my sovereign, — *centre de biche*, — my son, you must be awfully forgetful not to remember that triumphant idea.”

The duke turned round at these words and glanced disdainfully at the speaker, quite unaware of their effect on the King’s mind since the recent revelations of M. de Morvilliers.

The Duc d’Anjou was alarmed by them, and, laying a finger on his lips, he gazed fixedly on the Duc de Guise, pale and motionless as a statue of Prudence.

This time Henri did not see the signs of an understanding that showed the two princes had interests in common; but Chicot, approaching his ear under pretence of fixing one of his two paper hens between the little chains of rubies in his cap, whispered:

“Look at your brother, Henri.”

Henri raised his eyes quickly; the finger of the prince was lowered almost as quickly, but it was too late. Henri had seen the gesture and guessed its meaning.

“Sire,” continued the Duc de Guise, who had noticed Chicot’s action, but could not hear his words, “the Catholics have, indeed, called their association the holy League. and its prin-

cipal object is to strengthen the throne against the Huguenots, the mortal enemies of that throne."

"Well spoken," cried Chicot. "I approve *pedibus et nutu*."

"But," the duke went on, "to form an association is of little importance, no matter how compact the body may be, except it be directed in the course it should take. Now, in a kingdom like France, several millions of men cannot assemble without the consent of the king."

"Several millions of men!" cried Henri, making no effort to suppress his astonishment, which, in fact, might reasonably be interpreted as terror as well as amazement.

"Several millions of men," repeated Chicot. "Oh, it is but a small seed of discontent; but if planted by skilful hands — as I have no doubt it shall be — likely to produce quite a pretty crop."

The duke's patience was at length exhausted; he tightened his scornful lips, and, pressing his foot firmly on the floor, upon which he did not dare to stamp, he said:

"I am astonished, sire, that your Majesty should allow me to be interrupted when I am speaking to you of such serious matters."

Chicot, who pretended to feel all the justice of the duke's indignation, cast furious glances around him on every side, and, imitating the squeaking voice of the usher of the Parliament:

"Silence, I say!" cried he, "or, *ventre de biche*! you'll have a bone to pick with me!"

"Several millions of men!" said the King, who had considerable difficulty in swallowing these figures; "it is very flattering for the Catholic religion; and how many Protestants are there in my kingdom who oppose this association of so many millions?"

The duke seemed to be calculating.

"Four," said Chicot.

This fresh sally produced a burst of laughter among the King's friends, while the Duc de Guise frowned, and the gentlemen in the ante-chamber murmured loudly at the Gascon's audacity.

The King turned slowly toward the door from whence these murmurs proceeded, and as Henri, when he liked, could assume a look of great dignity, the murmurs ceased.

Then, fixing the same look on the duke, he said:

"Let us see, monsieur, what you wish; to the point, to the point!"

"I ask, sire, — for the popularity of my sovereign is, perhaps, even dearer to me than my own, — I ask that your Majesty show you are as superior to us in your zeal for the Catholic religion as you are in everything else, and so deprive the discontented of every pretext for renewing the wars."

"Oh, if it is a question of war, cousin," said Henri, "I have troops. In fact, you have some twenty-five thousand of them under your orders in the camp which you have just quitted with the object of aiding me with your excellent advice."

"Sire," said the duke, "when I speak of war I ought, perhaps, to explain myself."

"Explain yourself, cousin: you are a great captain, and it will give me, I assure you, great pleasure to hear you discourse on such subjects."

"Sire, I meant that, at the present time, kings have to sustain two wars, a moral war, if I may so express myself, and a political war: a war against ideas and a war against men."

"*Mordieu!*" cried Chicot, "what a powerful exposition!"

"Silence, fool!" said the King.

"Men," continued the duke, "men are visible, palpable, mortal. You can meet, attack, conquer them; and, when you have conquered them, you can have them tried and hanged; or, better still" —

"— you can hang them without trying them," said Chicot; "it is shorter and more kinglike."

"But ideas," the duke went on, "cannot be met in the same way, sire. They glide unseen and penetrate; they hide, especially from the eyes of those who wish to destroy them; concealed in the depths of souls, they there throw out deep roots; the more you cut off the branches that imprudently appear, the more potent and indestructible become the roots below. An idea, sire, is a young giant which must be watched night and day; for the idea that crept yesterday at your feet may to-morrow tower above your head. An idea, sire, is like a spark falling upon straw; there is need of good eyes to discover the beginning of the conflagration, and that, sire, is the reason why millions of watchers are needed."

"And therefore my four French Huguenots must be sent promptly to the devil!" cried Chicot; "*ventre de biche!* I pity them!"

“And it is in order to provide for and direct those watchers that I propose to your Majesty that you appoint a chief for this holy Union.”

“Have you spoken, cousin?” asked Henri of the duke.

“Yes, sire, and without ambiguity, as your Majesty must have perceived.”

Chicot heaved a tremendous sigh, while the Duc d'Anjou, recovered from his first alarm, smiled on the Lorraine prince.

“Well!” said the King to those around him, “what do you think of the matter, gentlemen?”

Chicot made no answer; he took off his hat and gloves, and, seizing a lion's skin by the tail, he dragged it into a corner of the apartment and lay down on it.

“What 's that you are doing, Chicot?” inquired the King.

“Sire,” said Chicot, “it is claimed that night brings good counsel. Why is this said to be so? because during night we sleep. I am going to sleep, sire, and to-morrow, when my brain is quite rested, I will give an answer to my cousin of Guise.”

And he stretched his legs out over the animal's claws.

The duke hurled a furious look at the Gascon, to which the latter, opening one eye, replied with a snore that resembled the rumbling of thunder.

“Well, sire,” asked the duke, “what is your Majesty's opinion?”

“My opinion is that you are quite right, as you always are, cousin. Assemble, then, your principal Leaguers, come to me at their head, and I will choose the man who ought to be their chief in the interests of religion.”

“And when am I to come, sire?” inquired the duke.

“To-morrow.”

While the King uttered the last word he skilfully divided his smile. The Duc de Guise had the first part of it, the Duc d'Anjou the second.

The latter was about to retire with the rest of the court; but, at the first step he took toward the door, Henri said:

“Stay, brother, I want to speak with you.”

The Duc de Guise pressed his forehead for an instant with his hand, as if he would thereby thrust back a whole world of thoughts, and then set out with his suite, who quickly disappeared under the vaults of the gallery.

A few minutes after, were heard the shouts of the multitude,

cheering him on leaving the Louvre as they had cheered him on entering it.

Chicot still snored, but we should not venture to say that he slept.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CASTOR AND POLLUX.

THE King, while retaining his brother, had dismissed his favorites.

The Duc d'Anjou who, during the whole preceding scene, had been successful enough in assuming an air of indifference, except in the eyes of Chicot and M. de Guise, accepted Henri's invitation without distrust. He had no suspicion of the glance the King had, at the Gascon's instigation, darted at him, and which had caught his indiscreet finger too near his lips.

"Brother," said Henri, after making sure that every one except Chicot had left, and marching with great strides from the door to the window, "do you know that I am a very happy prince?"

"Sire," said the duke, "if your Majesty be really happy, your happiness is but the reward which Heaven owes you on account of your merits."

Henri gazed on his brother.

"Yes, very happy," he continued, "for, when great ideas do not come to myself, they come to those who surround me. Now, the idea which has just entered the head of my cousin of Guise is a very great idea indeed!"

Chicot opened one eye, as if he did not hear so well with both eyes closed and as if he should understand the King's words better when he saw his face.

The duke bowed in sign of assent.

"In fact," went on Henri, "to unite all Catholics under one banner, to turn our kingdom into a church, and, without apparently intending to do so, to arm all France, from Calais to Languedoc, from Bretagne to Burgundy, so as to have an army always ready to march against England, Flanders, or Spain, without ever giving the slightest cause of suspicion to England, Flanders, or Spain, is, you must admit, François, a magnificent idea!"

"Is it not, sire?" said the Duc d'Anjou, delighted to see that his brother shared the views of his own ally, the Duc de Guise.

"Yes, and I confess I have the strongest feeling that the author of such a fine project should be amply rewarded."

Chicot opened both his eyes, but only to shut them again; he had detected on the King's face one of those imperceptible smiles, visible to him alone, for he knew his Henri better than any one, and this smile made him feel quite easy in his mind.

"Yes," continued Henri, "I repeat it, such a project deserves to be rewarded, and I am resolved to do everything in my power for its originator. But is the Duc de Guise, François, truly the father of this fine idea, or rather, of this fine work? for the work has begun, has it not, brother?"

The duke indicated by a sign that, in fact, the plan was already in operation.

"Better and better," returned the King. "I said I was a very happy prince; I ought to have said too happy, François, since not only do these ideas come to my neighbors, but, in the eagerness to be useful to their King and relative, they proceed at once to put them into execution. But I have already asked you, my dear François," said Henri, placing his hand on his brother's shoulder, "I have already asked you is it to the Duc de Guise that I am really indebted for a thought worthy of a king?"

"No, sire; Cardinal de Lorraine had the same idea twenty years ago, and the massacre of Saint Bartholomew alone prevented its execution, or rather rendered its execution needless at the time."

"Ah! how unfortunate it is that the cardinal is dead!" said Henri, "I should have had him elected Pope on the death of his Holiness Gregory XIII.; but," continued Henri, with that wonderful seeming frankness which made him the first comedian in his kingdom, "after all, his nephew has inherited his idea and has made it bear abundant fruit. Unfortunately, however, I cannot make him Pope, but I will make him — What can I make him, François that he is not already?"

"Sire," said François, completely deceived by his brother's words, "you exaggerate your cousin's merits; he has only inherited the idea, as I have already told you, and he has been powerfully aided in turning this idea to account."

"By his brother the cardinal?"

"Doubtless he has had something to do with cultivating it, but I do not mean him."

"Ah! the Due de Mayenne?"

"Oh, sire! you do him far too much honor."

"You are right. How could any statesmanlike idea enter the head of such a butcher. But to whom am I to show my gratitude for the help given my cousin of Guise, François?"

"To me, sire," answered the duke.

"To you!" exclaimed Henri, as if his astonishment were excessive.

Chicot again opened an eye.

The duke bowed.

"What!" said Henri, "when I saw every one let loose against me, the preachers against my vices, the poets and lampooners against my follies, the politicians against my faults, while my friends mocked at my impotence and my situation became so intolerable that I peaked and pined, had new white hairs in my head every day, such an idea came to you, François, to you whom I must confess (ah! how weak is man and how blind are kings!) I have not always regarded as my friend! Ah, François, how guilty I have been!"

And Henri, moved even to tears, held out his hand to his brother.

Chicot again opened both eyes.

"Oh!" continued Henri, "was there ever such a glorious idea! I was not able to levy taxes or levy troops without raising an outcry; I was not able to walk or sleep or make love without exciting ridicule, and lo! this idea of M. de Guise, or rather, of yourself, brother, gives me at once an army, money, friends and tranquillity. Now, in order that this tranquillity be permanent, one thing is necessary."

"What is it?"

"My cousin spoke just now of giving a chief to this great movement."

"Yes, undoubtedly."

"Of course, François, you see clearly that this chief cannot be one of my favorites; none of them has at once the brains and courage befitting so lofty a position. Quélus is brave; but the rascal is taken up entirely with his amours. Maugiron is brave; but the coxcomb thinks only of his toilet. Schomberg is brave; but even his best friends must acknowledge that he is anything but clever. D'Épernon is brave; but

he is, admittedly, a hypocrite; I cannot trust him for a moment, although I show him a fair face. But you know, François," said Henri, more unreservedly than ever, "that one of the heaviest burdens of a king is the necessity of constant dissimulation; and so when I can speak openly from my heart, as I am doing now, ah! I breathe."

Chicot closed both his eyes.

"Well, then," continued Henri, "if my cousin of Guise has originated the idea in the development of which you have had such an important share, François, he certainly has a right to the office of putting it into execution."

"What is this you are saying, sire?" cried François, trembling with anxiety.

"I say that the director of such a movement should be a great prince."

"Sire, be on your guard!"

"A good captain and an able negotiator."

"An able negotiator, especially," repeated the duke.

"Well, François, do you not think that, from every point of view, M. de Guise is admirably fitted for the post? Come, now, your opinion?"

"Brother," answered François, "M. de Guise is already very powerful."

"Certainly, but his power is of such a character that it really constitutes my strength."

"The Duc de Guise holds the army and the populace; the Cardinal de Lorraine holds the Church; Mayenne is an instrument in the hands of his two brothers; you would, certainly, concentrate an immense amount of power in a single house if you did what you say."

"True," said Henri; "I have already thought of that, François."

"If the Guises were French princes I could understand it; it would be their interest to increase the power of the house of France."

"No doubt, while, on the contrary, they are Lorraine princes."

"A house which has ever been the rival of ours."

"Ha! François, you have just touched the sore. *Tudieu!* I did not believe you were so good a politician — well, yes, you see it now; you know now why I have grown so thin, why my hair is white. The cause of this is the elevation of

the house of Lorraine to a place of rivalry with ours; for, look you, François, a single day does not pass that these three Guises — you spoke truly, the three hold everything — there passes not a day that the duke, or the cardinal, or Mayenne — one or the other of them, at any rate — does not by audacity, or adroitness, or force, or craft, rob me of some fragment of my power, some particle of my prerogatives, while I am too poor, weak, and isolated a creature to be able to make head against them. Ah! François, if we could have had this explanation earlier, if I could have read in your heart what I read now, most assuredly, having your support, I should have offered a firmer resistance than I have done; but it is too late now, as you must see yourself."

"Why so?"

"Because there would be a struggle, and, in truth, every struggle wearies me to death; I must, therefore, name him chief of the League."

"You will be wrong, brother."

"But whom would you have me name, François? Who would accept this perilous post, for perilous it is? Do you not see what was the meaning of the duke's words? Do you not see he intended I should name him?"

"Well?"

"Well! why, any man I should name in his stead he would regard as an enemy!"

"Name some man so powerful that his strength, supported by yours, will be a match for the power and strength of all the Lorraines together."

"Ah! my good brother," said Henri in a tone of utter discouragement, "I do not know a single person who unites the qualities you mention."

"Look around you, sire."

"Around me? Why, the only true friends I see are you and Chicot, brother."

"Oho!" murmured Chicot, "would he be likely to play a trick on me?"

And he shut both his eyes.

"Well, brother," said the duke, "you do not understand."

Henri gazed at his brother as if a veil had just dropped from his eyes.

"What?" he cried.

François made a sign with his head.

"But no," said Henri; "you would never consent, François! The work would be too rough; you would surely never undertake the task of exercising all these worthy citizens; you would never give yourself the trouble of going through all the sermons of their preachers; and, in case there was a fight, you would never transform yourself into a butcher and turn the streets of Paris into slaughter-pens. To do so, you should have to be triiform like M. de Guise, and have a right arm named Charles, and a left arm called Louis. Now, the duke proved himself quite a master-hand at killing during the day of Saint Bartholomew; don't you think so, François?"

"Far too good a master-hand, sire!"

"Yes, perhaps. But you do not answer my question, François. What! you would like the sort of trade to which I have just alluded! You would rub up against the cracked breast-plates of these cockneys and the old stewpans they substitute for helmets? What! you would become a hero of the populace, you, the chief lord of our court? *Mort-de-ma-vie!* brother, what changes age does bring with it!"

"I would not, perhaps, do so for my own sake, sire; but I would certainly do it for yours."

"Good brother, excellent brother," said Henri, wiping away with the tip of his finger a tear that had never existed.

"Then," said François, "you would not be displeased if I undertook the task you were thinking of entrusting to M. de Guise?"

"Displeased?" exclaimed Henri. "*Corne du diable!* so far from being displeased, I should be delighted, on the contrary. So you, too, had been thinking of the League? So much the better, *mordieux!* so much the better. So you, too, had caught hold of the small end of the idea; what nonsense I am talking when I say the small end? — the big end. What you have told me is, I give you my word, really marvellous. In good sooth, I am surrounded by superior intellects, and I am myself the greatest ass in my realm."

"Oh, your Majesty jests."

"Jests? God forbid! the situation is too serious. I say what I think, François. You really relieve me from a very embarrassing position, the more embarrassing, François, because I am ill and my mind is not as strong as it was. Miron has shown me this often. But let us return to something more important; and, besides, what use is my mind to me,

when I can light my path by the brilliancy of yours? It is agreed, then, that I shall name you chief of the League, is it not?"

François started with joy.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "if your Majesty believed me worthy of such confidence!"

"Confidenee! ah, François, confidence! As long as M. de Guise is not that chief, whom can I distrust? The League? Have I, perchance, any danger to fear from the League? Speak, my dear François, tell me everything."

"Oh! sire," protested the duke.

"What a fool I am!" rejoined Henri. "In such a case, my brother would not be its chief; or, better still, from the moment he became its chief, all danger would vanish. Eh? that is sound logic, now, is it not? Clearly, my old pedagogue gave me something, at least, in return for my money. No, by my faith, I have no distrust. Besides, there are a goodly number of stout warriors in France who would be sure to draw the sword against the League whenever the League refused to give me free elbow-room."

"True, sire," answered the duke, with an artless frankness that was almost as cleverly assumed as his brother's, but not quite; "the King is still the King."

Chicot opened an eye.

"Indeed!" said Henri. "But unfortunately an idea has also come into my head. It is incredible how many ideas are sprouting to-day; there are days, however, of that sort."

"What idea, brother?" inquired the duke, uneasily, for he could hardly believe that such good fortune could fall on his head without meeting some obstacle on the way.

"Oh, our cousin of Guise, the father, or rather, the putative father, of the invention, has probably gone away with the notion that he is to be the chief. He is sure to want to be the commander."

"The commander, sire?"

"Without doubt, without even the slightest doubt. He has probably cherished the idea solely because it would be profitable to him. It is true that you, too, have cherished it. But take care, François; he is not the man to stand being the victim of the *Sic vos non vobis* — you know your Virgil — *nidificatis, aves*."

"Oh! sire."

"François. I should be willing to wager the thought has occurred to him. He knows I am so giddy."

"Oh, the moment you make known your will, he will yield."

"Or pretend to yield. I have said already, 'Take care, François.' He has a long arm, has my cousin of Guise. I will say even more; I will say he has long arms, and that not a man in the kingdom except him, not even the King, can stretch his arms so far as to touch with one hand the Spains and with the other England: Don Juan of Austria and Elizabeth. Bourbon's sword was not as long as my cousin of Guise's arm, and yet he did much harm to our grandfather, François I."

"But," answered François, "if your Majesty consider him so dangerous, the stronger the reason why you should give me the command of the League. He will thus be caught between my power and yours, and then you can easily have him tried after the first treasonable enterprise."

Chicot opened the other eye.

"Have him tried, François, have him tried? An easy thing for Louis XI., who was rich and powerful, to have men tried and erect scaffolds for them. But I have not money enough even to purchase all the black velvet I should need."

While saying these words, Henri, who, in spite of his self-control, had grown excited, flashed a piercing glance at the duke, which compelled him to lower his eyes.

Chicot closed both his.

There was a moment's silence between the two princes.

The King was the first to break it.

"You must be very prudent, my dear François, in everything," said he; "no civil wars, no quarrels between my subjects. Though I am the son of Henri the Contentious, I am also the son of Catharine the Crafty, and I have inherited a little of the astuteness of my mother. I will recall the Duc de Guise and make him so many promises that everything shall be arranged amicably."

"Sire," cried the Duc d'Anjou, "you grant me the command, do you not?"

"Certainly."

"And you wish me to have it?"

"It is my fondest wish. But we must not give too much umbrage to my cousin of Guise in this matter."

"Then your Majesty may make your mind easy," said the

Duc d'Anjou; "if this be the only obstacle you see to my nomination, I can arrange the matter with the duke."

"But when?"

"Immediately."

"Are you going in search of him? going to visit him? Oh, brother! just think of it, will not that be doing him too much honor?"

"No, sire, I am not going in search of him."

"How is that?"

"He is waiting for me."

"Where?"

"In my apartments."

"In your apartments? Why, I heard the cheers that hailed him as he left the Louvre!"

"Yes; but, after leaving the grand gate, he returned by the postern. The King had a right to the Duc de Guise's first visit; I had a right to the second."

"Ah, brother," said Henri, "how grateful I am to you for thus supporting our prerogatives, which I am sometimes weak enough to abandon! Go, then, François, and try to come to an understanding with him."

The duke took his brother's hand and bowed to kiss it.

"What are you doing, François?" cried Henri; "to my arms, on my heart, there is your true place!"

And the two brothers embraced several times; then, after a last one, the Duc d'Anjou, restored to liberty, passed out of the cabinet, crossed the galleries rapidly, and ran to his apartments.

His heart, like that of the first mariner, must have been encased in oak and steel not to have burst with joy.

As soon as his brother was gone, the King gnashed his teeth in his rage, and, darting through the secret corridor which led to the chamber of Marguerite of Navarre, now the Duc d'Anjou's, he reached a hiding-place where he could easily hear the conversation about to take place between the two dukes, just as Dionysius from his hiding-place could hear the conversation of his prisoners.

"*Ventre de biche!*" said Chicot, now opening both eyes at once, "but family scenes are touching! For a moment I thought I was in Olympus and witnessing the meeting of Castor and Pollux after their six months' separation."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WHICH PROVES THAT LISTENING IS THE BEST WAY OF
HEARING.

THE Duc d'Anjou was now with his guest, the Duc de Guise, in that chamber of the Queen of Navarre where formerly the Béarnais and De Mouy had discussed their plans of escape in a low voice, with mouth glued to ear. The provident Henri knew there were few apartments in the Louvre which had not been so constructed that words, even spoken in a whisper, could be heard by such as desired to hear them. The Duc d'Anjou was by no means ignorant of this important fact; but he had been so completely beguiled by his open-hearted brother that he either forgot it now or else did not consider the matter of much moment.

Henri III., as we have stated, entered his observatory just at the moment when the Duc d'Anjou entered his apartment, so that none of the speakers' words could escape his ears.

"Well, monseigneur?" quickly asked the Duc de Guise.

"Well, monsieur, the council has separated," answered the duke.

"You were very pale, monseigneur."

"Visibly?" asked the prince, anxiously.

"To me, yes, monseigneur."

"Did the King notice anything?"

"No, at least so I believe. So his Majesty detained your highness?"

"As you saw, duke."

"Doubtless to speak of the proposal I had just laid before him?"

"Yes, monsieur."

There was a moment of rather embarrassing silence; its meaning was well understood by Henri, who was so placed that he could not miss a word of the conversation.

"And what did his Majesty say, monseigneur?" asked the Duc de Guise.

"The King approves the idea; but its very immensity leads him to believe that such a man as you at the head of such an organization would be dangerous."

"Then we are likely to fail."

"I am afraid we are, my dear duke, and the League seems to me out of the question."

"The devil!" muttered the duke, "it would be death before birth, ending before beginning."

"The one has as much wit as the other," said a low, sarcastic voice, the words ringing in Henri's ear, as he leaned close to the wall.

Henri turned round quickly, and saw the tall body of Chicot listening at one hole, just as he was listening at another.

"So you followed me, rascal," cried the King.

"Hush!" said Chicot, making a gesture with his hand; "hush, my son, you hinder me from hearing."

The King shrugged his shoulders, but as Chicot was, on the whole, the only being in whom he placed entire confidence, he went back to his occupation of listening.

The Duc de Guise was speaking again.

"Monseigneur," said he, "I think, in that case, the King would have refused immediately. His reception of me was so harsh that surely he would have ventured to be plain about the matter. Does he desire to oust me from the office of chief?"

"I believe so," answered the prince, hesitatingly.

"Then he wants to ruin the enterprise?"

"Assuredly," said the Duc d'Anjou; "though as you began the movement, I felt it my duty to give you every aid I could, and I have done so."

"In what way, monseigneur?"

"In a way that has partially succeeded: the King has left it in my power to either kill or revive the League."

"In what manner?" asked the Lorraine prince, whose eyes flashed in spite of himself.

"Listen. Of course, you understand the plan would have to be submitted to the principal leaders. What if, instead of expelling you and dissolving the League, he named a chief favorable to the enterprise? What if, instead of raising the Duc de Guise to that post, he substituted the Duc d'Anjou?"

"Ah!" cried the duke, who could not suppress the exclamation or prevent the blood from mounting to his face.

"Good!" said Chicot, "the two bulldogs are going to fight over their bone."

But to the great surprise of the Gascon, and especially of the King, who was not so well informed on this matter as his

jester, the duke's amazement and irritation suddenly vanished, and, in a calm and almost joyful tone, he said :

" You are an able politician, monseigneur, if you have done that."

" I have done it," answered the duke.

" And very speedily !"

" Yes ; but I ought to tell you that circumstances aided me and I turned them to account ; nevertheless, my dear duke," added the prince, " nothing is settled, and I would not conclude anything before seeing you."

" Why so, monseigneur ?"

" Because I do not yet know what this is going to lead us to."

" I do, and well, too," said Chicot.

" Quite a nice little plot," murmured Henri, with a smile.

" And about which M. de Morvilliers, whom you fancy to be so well informed, never said a word to you. But let us listen ; this is growing quite interesting."

" Then I will tell you, monseigneur, not what it is going to lead us to, for God alone knows that, but how it can serve us," returned the Duc de Guise ; " the League is a second army ; now, as I hold the first one, as my brother holds the Church, nothing can resist us, if we remain united."

" Without reckoning that I am heir presumptive to the crown."

" Aha !" muttered Henri.

" He is right," said Chicot ; " your fault, my son ; you always keep the two chemises of our Lady of Chartres separated."

" But, monseigneur, though you are heir presumptive to the crown, you must take into account certain bad chances."

" Duke, do you believe I have not done so already, and that I have not weighed them a hundred times ?"

" There is first the King of Navarre."

" Oh, that fellow does not trouble me at all ; he is too busy making love to La Fossense."

" That fellow, monseigneur, will dispute with you your very purse-strings. He is lean, famished, out-at-elbows ; he resembles those gutter cats that, after merely smelling a mouse, will pass whole nights on the sill of a garret window, while your fat, furry, pampered cat cannot draw its claws because of their heaviness from their velvet sheaths. The King of Navarre has his eyes on you ; he is constantly on the watch, and

never loses sight either of you or your brother; he is hungry for your throne. Wait until some accident happen to him who is now seated on it; you will then see what elastic muscles your famished cat has; you will see whether he will jump with a single bound from Pau to Paris and fasten his claws in your flesh; you will see, monseigneur, you will see."

"Some accident to him who is now seated on the throne," repeated François slowly, fixing his eyes inquiringly on the Duc de Guise.

"Ha! ha!" murmured Chicot, "listen, Henri. This Guise is saying, or, rather, on the point of saying, things that ought to teach you something, and I should advise you to turn them to your advantage."

"Yes, monseigneur," continued the Duc de Guise, "an accident! Accidents are not rare in your family, a fact you know as well as I do, and, perhaps, better. This prince is in good health, and suddenly he falls into a lethargy; that other is counting on long years, and he has but a few hours to live."

"Do you hear Henri? Do you understand?" said Chicot, taking the King's hand, which was trembling and covered with a cold perspiration.

"Yes, it is true," answered the Duc d'Anjou, in a voice so dull that, to hear it, the King and Chicot were forced to pay double attention, "it is true; the princes of my house are born under a fatal star. My brother, Henri III., is, thank God! sound and healthy. He endured formerly the fatigues of war, and now his life is a series of recreations, recreations he supports as he formerly supported the fatigues of war."

"Yes, monseigneur; but remember this one thing," returned the duke: "the recreations to which French kings are addicted are not always without danger. How, for instance, did your father, Henri II., die, who had happily escaped all the risks of war to meet his fate in one of those recreations of which you have spoken? The lance of Montgomery was used as a weapon of chivalry, intended for a breastplate and not for an eye. I am inclined to think myself that the death of King Henri II. was an accident. You will tell me that, a fortnight after this accident, the queen mother had M. de Montgomery arrested and beheaded. That is true, but the King was not the less dead. As for your brother, the late King François, — a worthy prince, though his mental weakness made the people regard him with some contempt, —

he, too, died very unfortunately. You will say, monseigneur, he died of a disease in his ears, and who the devil would look upon that as an accident? Yet it was an accident, and a very grave one. I have heard more than once, both in the city and camp, that this mortal disease had been poured into the ear of King François II. by some one whom it would be very wrong to call Chance, since he bore another well-known name."

"Duke!" murmured François, turning crimson.

"Yes, monseigneur, yes," continued the duke, "the name of king has long brought misfortune in its train. The name king might be defined by the word *insecurity*. Look at Antoine de Bourbon. It was certainly his name of king that gained him that arquebuse-wound in the shoulder, of which he died. For any one but a king the wound was by no means fatal; yet he died of it. The eye, the ear, and the shoulder have been the occasion of much sorrow in France; and, by the way, that reminds me that your friend, M. de Bussy, has made some rather nice verses on the subject."

"What verses?" asked Henri.

"Nonsense, man!" retorted Chicot; "do you mean to tell me you don't know them?"

"Yes."

"Well you are, beyond yea or nay, a true King, when it's possible to hide such things from you. I am going to repeat them; listen:

"By the ear and the shoulder and eye
Three French Kings have been fated to die.
By the shoulder, the eye, and the ear
Three French Kings have been sent to their bier."

"But hush! hush! I have an idea we are going to hear something from your brother even more interesting than what we have heard already."

"But the last verse."

"You'll have it later when M. de Bussy turns his hexastich into a decastich."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the family picture lacks two personages. But listen, M. de Guise is about to speak; and you may be certain *he* hasn't forgot the verses."

Just when Chicot had finished, the dialogue began again.

"Moreover, monseigneur," continued the duke, "the whole

history of your relatives and allies is not contained in the verses of Bussy."

"What did I tell you!" said Chicot, nudging Henri with his elbow.

"For instance, there was Jeanne d'Albret, the mother of the Béarnais, who died through the nose from smelling a pair of perfumed gloves, bought by her from a Florentine living at the Pont du Michel; a very unexpected accident, quite surprising to every one, especially as it was known there were people who had an interest in her death. You will not deny, monseigneur, that this death astonished you exceedingly?"

The duke's only answer was a contraction of the eyebrows that rendered his sinister face more sinister still.

"And then, take the accident to King Charles IX., which your highness has forgotten," said the duke; "and yet it is surely one which deserves to be remembered. It was not through eye or ear or shoulder or nose that his accident happened, it was through the mouth."

"What do you mean?" cried François.

And Henri III. heard the echo of his brother's footstep on the floor as he started back in terror.

"Yes, monseigneur, through the mouth," repeated Guise; "those hunting-books are very dangerous whose pages are glued to each other, so that, in order to turn over the leaves, you have to wet your finger with saliva every moment. There is something poisonous in the very nature of old books and when this poison mingles with the saliva, even a king cannot live forever."

"Duke! duke!" exclaimed the prince, "I believe you really take a pleasure in inventing crimes."

"Crimes, monseigneur?" asked Guise; "and pray, who is talking of crimes? I am relating accidents, that is all, accidents. I wish you to understand clearly, monseigneur, that I am dealing solely and entirely with accidents and nothing else. Was not that misfortune Charles IX. encountered while hunting also an accident?"

"Aha! Henri," said Chicot, "you are a hunter; this must have some interest for you. Listen, listen, my son, you're going to hear something curious."

"I know what it is," said Henri.

"But I don't; at that time, I had not been presented at court; don't hinder me from hearing, my son."

"You know the hunt of which I am about to speak, monseigneur?" continued the Lorraine prince. "I allude to the hunt in which, with the noble intention of killing the boar that turned on your brother, you fired in such a hurry that, instead of killing the animal at which you aimed, you wounded him at whom you did not aim. That arquebuse-shot, monseigneur, is a signal proof of the necessity of distrusting accidents. In fact, at court your skill in shooting was a matter of notoriety. Your highness had never been known before to miss your aim, and you must have been very much astonished at your failure in that instance, and very much annoyed, especially as malevolent persons propagated the report that, but for the King of Navarre, who fortunately slew the boar your highness failed to slay, his Majesty, as he had fallen from his horse, must have certainly been killed."

"But," answered the Due d'Anjou, trying to recover the composure so sadly shaken by the ironical words of Guise, "what interest had I in my brother's death, when the successor of Charles IX. must be Henri III.?"

"One moment, monseigneur, let us understand each other — one throne was already vacant, that of Poland. The death of King Charles IX. left another, that of France. Doubtless I am aware that your eldest brother would have certainly chosen the throne of France. But the throne of Poland was not so very bad a makeshift. There are many people, I have been told, who have coveted even the poor little throne of Navarre. Moreover, the death of Charles would bring you a step nearer to royalty, and then, there was no reason why you should not profit by the next accident. King Henri III. was able to return from Warsaw in ten days; what was to hinder you from doing, in case of an accident, what King Henri had done?"

Henri III. looked at Chicot, who looked at him in turn, not with his usual expression of malice and sarcasm, but with an almost tender interest, which, however, quickly vanished from his bronzed face.

"Well, what do you conclude from all this?" asked the Due d'Anjou, ending, or, rather, trying to end, a conversation in which the thinly veiled discontent of the Due de Guise made itself evident.

"Monseigneur, I conclude that every king has his accident, as we were saying just now. Now, you are the inevitable accident of Henry III., especially if you are the chief of the

League, for to be chief of the League is almost to be the king of the King; not to mention that, by becoming chief of the League, you get rid of the Béarnais, that is to say, you destroy the 'accident' of your highness' coming reign."

"Coming! do you hear him?" cried Henri III.

"*Ventre de biche!* I should say I do," answered Chicot.

"Then?" — said the Duc de Guise.

"Then," repeated the Duc d'Anjou, "I will accept. You advise me to do so, do you not?"

"Advise you!" cried the Lorraine prince, "I entreat you to accept, monseigneur."

"And what will you do to-night?"

"Oh, as to that, you may be easy. My men are all ready, and to-night Paris will see some curious scenes."

"What are they going to do in Paris to-night?" asked Henri of Chicot.

"What! you can't guess?" answered the jester.

"No."

"What a donkey you are, my son! To-night the League is to be signed publicly. For a long time our good Parisians have been signing it privately; they were waiting for your sanction; you gave it this morning, and they are signing to-night, *ventre de biche!* You see, Henri, your 'accidents' — for you have now two of them — are not losing their time."

"Very well," said the Duc d'Anjou; "till to-night, then, duke."

"Yes; till to-night," said Henri.

"What! you will run the risk of parading your capital to-night, Henri?" asked Chicot.

"Undoubtedly."

"You are wrong, Henri."

"Why?"

"Look out for the accidents!"

"Do not be alarmed. I shall be well attended. You come with me."

"What do you take me for — a Huguenot? I am a good Catholic, my son, and to-night I go to sign the League, sign it ten times rather than once, — yea, a hundred times rather than ten."

The voices of the two dukes were now silent.

"One word," said Henri, detaining Chicot, as he was moving off. "What do you think of all this?"

"I think none of your royal predecessors was forewarned of his accident. Henri II. was not forewarned about his eye; Antoine de Bourbon was not forewarned about his shoulder; Jeanne d'Albret was not forewarned about her nose; Charles IX. was not forewarned about his mouth. So you see you have a great advantage over them, Master Henri, for, *ventre de biche!* you know your brother, don't you, sire?"

"Yes," said Henri, "and, *par la mordieu!* before very long he'll know me, too!"

CHAPTER XL.

HOW THE LEAGUE HAD AN EVENING PARTY.

ALL that distinguishes the Paris of to-day during its festivals is an uproar more or less noisy, a crowd more or less considerable, but always the same uproar and the same crowd. The Paris of olden time had a good deal more to show for itself than this. The narrow streets themselves were singularly beautiful, with their houses of many gables, balconies, and carved woodwork, while each house had a characteristic physiognomy of its own; then the crowds of people, all in a hurry and all rushing to the same point, expressing frankly their mutual admiration or contempt, hooting this one or that one who had something strange about him that separated him from his neighbors. The language, dress, arms, gesture, voice, and demeanor, formed each in itself a curious detail, and these thousand details, assembled on a single point, made up a picture of the most interesting description.

Now, this is what Paris was at eight in the evening on the day when M. de Guise, after his visit to the King and his conversation with the Duc d'Anjou, decided on having the good citizens of the capital of the realm sign the League.

A crowd of citizens dressed in their holiday apparel, or armed with their handsomest weapons, as if for a review or a battle, directed their steps to the churches. The faces of all these men, moved by the same feeling and marching to the same goal, were at once joyous and menacing, the latter especially when they passed in front of a post of the Swiss guards or the light horse. The expression of their features, and, notably, the cries, hisses, and bravados that corresponded

with it, would have alarmed M. de Morvilliers if that magistrate had not known his good Parisians thoroughly — a mocking and rather irritating race, but incapable of mischief, except drawn into it by some wicked leader or provoked to it by some imprudent enemy.

What added to the noise and confusion of the crowd, and at the same time added to the variety and picturesqueness of the scene, was the presence of large numbers of women, who, disdainful to keep house on such an important day, had either compelled or persuaded their husbands to take them with them. Some had even done better, and had brought with them their batches of children; and it was rather comical to see these brats tied, as it were, to the monstrous muskets, gigantic sabres, and terrible halberds of their fathers. In fact, in all times and ages the little vagabond of Paris has liked to trail a weapon when he could not carry it, or to admire it when he could not trail it.

From time to time, a group, more fiery than the others, drew their old swords from their scabbards; it was especially when passing before some dwelling supposed to be the abode of a Huguenot that this demonstration took place. Thereupon the children shrieked out: "Death to the Huguenots!" while the fathers shouted: "To the stake with the heretics! To the stake! To the stake!"

These cries drew to the windows the pale face of some old servant or dark-featured minister. Then our citizen, proud and happy at having frightened some one more cowardly than himself, like the hare in La Fontaine, continued his triumphal march, and carried his noisy and harmless menace in another direction.

But it was in the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec, especially, that the crowd was the thickest. The street was literally packed, and the throng pressed tumultuously toward a bright light suspended below a sign, which many of our readers will recognize when we say that this sign represented on a blue ground a chicken in the process of being cooked, with this legend: "A la Belle-Étoile."

On the threshold, a man with a square cotton cap — made according to the fashion of the time — on a head that was perfectly bald, was haranguing and arguing. With one hand he brandished a naked sword, and waved a register, already half filled with signatures, with the other, crying at the top of

his voice: "Come on, come on, honest Catholics; enter the hostelry of the Belle-Étoile, where you will find good wine and a good welcome; come on, the moment is propitious; to-night the good will be separated from the wicked; to-morrow morning we shall know the wheat from the tares; come on, gentlemen; those who can write will come and write; those who cannot will give their names and surnames to me, Maître la Hurière, or to my assistant, M. Croquentin."

This M. Croquentin, a young rascal from Perigord, clad in white like Eliakim, and girt with a cord in which were stuck a knife and an inkhorn, — this M. Croquentin, we repeat, was writing rapidly the names of his neighbors, at the head of which he placed that of his respectable employer, Maître la Hurière.

"Gentlemen," shrieked the innkeeper of the Belle-Étoile, "gentlemen, it is for our holy religion! Hurrah for our holy religion, gentlemen! Hurrah for the Mass!"

He was nearly strangled from emotion and weariness, for this enthusiasm of his had been having full swing ever since four in the afternoon.

The result of it was that numbers, animated with the same zeal, signed their names on his register if they could write, or delivered them to Croquentin if they could not.

All this was the more flattering for La Hurière because he had a serious rival in the church of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, which stood close by. But fortunately the faithful were very numerous at that time, and the two establishments, instead of injuring, helped each other: those who could not penetrate into the church to sign their names in the register on the high altar tried to slip through to the place where La Hurière and Croquentin officiated as secretaries; and those who failed to reach La Hurière and Croquentin hoped for better luck at Saint Germain l'Auxerrois.

When the registers of the innkeeper and his assistant were full, La Hurière called for two more, so that there might be no interruption in the signatures, and the invitations were then cried out anew by the innkeeper, proud of his first success, which must, he was sure, gain him that high position in the opinion of M. de Guise to which he had long aspired.

While the signers of the new registers were surrendering themselves to the impulses of a zeal that was constantly growing warmer, and that was, as we have said, ebbing back

from one point to another, a man of lofty stature was seen elbowing his way through the crowd, distributing quite a number of blows and kicks on his passage, until he finally reached M. Fromentin's register.

Then he took the pen from an honest citizen who had just signed in a trembling hand, and traced his name in letters half an inch long, so that, what with his magnificent flourishes, splashes, and labyrinthine windings, the page, lately so white, became suddenly black. After this, he passed his pen to an aspirant who was waiting his turn behind him.

"Chicot!" read the next signer.

"Confound it!" said the latter, "what a magnificent hand this gentleman writes!"

Chicot, for it was he, had refused, as we have seen, to accompany Henri, and was determined to have a little fun with the League on his own account.

Chicot, having verified his presence on the register of M. Croquentin, passed immediately to that of Maître la Hurière. The innkeeper had seen the glorious flourishes admiringly but enviously. The Gascon was, therefore, received, not with open arms, but with open register, and, taking a pen from the hand of a woollen merchant who lived in the Rue de Béthisy, he wrote his name a second time with flourishes even more intricate and dazzling than the first; after which, he asked La Hurière if he had not a third register.

The innkeeper did not understand a joke; he was poor company outside his hostelry. He looked crossly at Chicot, Chicot stared at him in return. La Hurière muttered "heretic;" Chicot mumbled something about his "wretched cookshop." La Hurière laid down his register and seized his sword; Chicot laid down his pen and did the same. The scene, in all probability, would have ended in a collision, about the result of which the innkeeper would have had no reason to congratulate himself, when some one pinched the Gascon's elbow and he turned round.

The pincher was no other than the King, disguised as a citizen, and, with him, Quélus and Maugiron, in the same disguise, but with arquebuses on their shoulders as well as rapiers at their sides.

"Well, well!" said the King; "how is this? Good Catholics quarreling! *Par la mordieu!* 't is a bad example."

"My good gentleman," answered Chicot, pretending not to

recognize the King. "please to mind your own business. I am dealing with a blackguard who bawls after passers-by to sign his register, and, after they sign it, he bawls louder still."

The attention of La Hurière was distracted by new signers, and a rush of the crowd hustled Chicot, the King, and his minions away from the hostelry of the fanatic innkeeper. They took refuge on the top of a flight of steps from which they could see over the crowd.

"What enthusiasm!" cried Henri. "The interests of religion must be well advanced in my good city of Paris to-night."

"Yes, sire," answered Chicot; "but it is bad weather for heretics, and your Majesty knows that you are considered one. Look yonder, on the left; well, what do you see?"

"Ah! Mayenne's broad face and the sharp muzzle of the cardinal."

"Hush, sire; we play a safe game when we know where our enemies are and our enemies do not know where we are."

"Do you think, then, I have anything to fear?"

"Anything to fear? Great heavens! sire, in a crowd like this it is impossible to answer for anything. You have a knife in your pocket, that knife makes its way innocently into your neighbor's belly, quite unconscious of what it is doing, the ignorant thing! Your neighbor swears an oath and gives up the ghost. Let us go somewhere else, sire."

"Have I been seen?"

"I do not think so, but you will undoubtedly be if you remain longer here."

"Hurrah for the Mass! hurrah for the Mass!" cried a stream of people who came from the market-places, surged along like a tide, and was swallowed up in the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec.

"Long live M. de Guise! long live the cardinal! long live M. de Mayenne!" answered the crowd before the door of La Hurière, which had just recognized the two Lorraine princes.

"What mean those cries," said Henri, frowning.

"They mean that every one has his own place and should stay there: M. de Guise in the streets and you in the Louvre. Go to the Louvre, sire, go to the Louvre."

"You come with us?"

"I? Oh, no! you don't need me, my son; you have your ordinary bodyguards. Quélus, start at once, and you, Maugiron, do the same. As for me, I want to see the spectacle to the finish; it's queer, if not amusing."

"Where are you going?"

"To put my name on the other registers. I want to have a thousand of my autographs running the streets of Paris to-morrow morning. We are now on the quay; good night, my son; you turn to the right, I to the left: each his own road. I am hurrying to Saint Méry to hear a famous preacher."

"Oh! stop, I say!" said the King, suddenly; "what is this new uproar, and why are people running in the direction of the Pont-Neuf?"

Chicot stood on tiptoe, but all he could see at first was a mass of people crying, howling, and pushing, apparently carrying some one or something in triumph.

At length, at the point where the quay, widening in front of the Rue des Lavandières, allows a crowd to spread to the right and left, the waves of the popular ocean opened, and, like the monster borne by the flood to the very feet of Hippolytus, a man, seemingly the principal actor in this burlesque scene, was driven by these human waves to the feet of the King.

This man was a monk mounted on an ass. The monk was speaking and gesticulating.

The ass was braying.

"*Ventre de biche!*" said Chicot, as soon as he could distinguish the man and animal now entering on the stage, the one on top of the other; "I was speaking of a famous preacher who was to hold forth at Saint Méry; it is n't necessary to go so far; listen to this one."

"A preacher on a donkey?" said Quélus.

"Why not, my son?"

"Why, it's Silenus himself," said Maugiron.

"Which is the preacher?" asked Henri; "they are both speaking together."

"The one underneath is the most eloquent," answered Chicot, "but the one on the top speaks the best French; listen, Henri, listen."

"Silence!" cried every one, "silence!"

"Silence!" cried Chicot, in a voice that rose high above all other voices.

After this, not a sound was heard. A circle was made round the monk and the ass. The monk dashed at once into his exordium.

"Brethren," said he, "Paris is a superb city; Paris is the

pride of the Kingdom of France and the Parisians are a remarkably clever people: the song says so."

And the monk began to sing at the top of his voice:

" 'You've come from Paris, fair friend; —
So you know all that ever was penned! ' "

But the ass blended his accompaniment so loudly and energetically with the words, or rather, with the air, that he stopped the mouth of his rider.

The people burst into a roar of laughter.

"Keep still, Panurge, keep still, I say," cried the monk; "you shall speak in your turn; but let me speak first."

The ass was quiet.

"My brethren," continued the preacher, "the earth is a valley of tears, a place where, most of the time, a man can quench his thirst only with his tears."

"Why, he's dead drunk!" said the King.

"Not unlikely," answered Chicot.

"I, who speak to you," continued the monk, "am returning from exile like the Hebrews, and, for a whole week, Panurge and myself have been living on alms and privations."

"Who is Panurge?" inquired the King.

"Probably the superior of his convent," answered Chicot. "But let me listen: the artless creature is really affecting."

"Who made me endure all this, my friends? It was Herod. You know what Herod I mean."

"And you, too, my son," said Chicot; "I explained the anagram to you."

"You rascal!"

"To whom are you speaking? — to me or the ass or the monk?"

"To all three."

"My brethren," the monk went on, "behold my ass whom I love as much as if it were a sheep! he will tell you that we have come from Villeneuve-le-Roi in three days in order to take part in to-night's great solemnity. And how have we come? —

" 'With empty purse,
And gullet dry.' "

But no affliction could keep me and Panurge away."

"But who the devil is Panurge?" asked Henri, who could not keep this Pantagrueic name out of his head.

"We have come, then," continued the monk. "and also we have arrived, to see what is passing; but we see and do not understand. What is passing, my brethren? Is Herod to be deposed to-day? Is Brother Henri to be put into a convent to-day?"

"I tell you," said Quélus, "I have a strong desire to let out the contents of this swill-barrel. What do you say, Maugiron?"

"Bah!" said Chicot, "it takes so little to stir you up, Quélus. Don't they put the King in a convent every day of his life? Believe me, Henri, if that is all they do to you, you haven't much reason to complain. Is that not the case, Panurge?"

The ass, hearing his name called, pricked up his ears and began braying in a fashion that was absolutely terrific.

"Oh, Panurge! Panurge!" said the monk, "you should control your passions. Gentlemen," he went on, "I left Paris with two travelling companions: Panurge, who is my ass, and M. Chicot, who is his Majesty's jester. Gentlemen, can any of you tell me what has become of my friend Chicot?"

Chicot made a grimace.

"Ha!" said the King, "so he's your friend?"

Quélus and Maugiron burst out laughing.

"A handsome creature, your friend," continued the King, "and respectable withal. What is his name?"

"Gorenflot, Henri; you know something of this dear Gorenflot of mine. M. de Morvilliers spoke a few words to you about him."

"The incendiary of Sainte Geneviève?"

"The same."

"In that case I'll have him hanged."

"Impossible!"

"Why?"

"He's got no neck."

"My brethren," continued Gorenflot, "in me you behold a true martyr. My brethren, it is my cause that is being defended at this moment, or rather, the cause of all good Catholics. You do not know what is going on in the provinces and what the Huguenots are hatching. At Lyons we were obliged to kill one of them, who was preaching rebellion. As long as a single one of the brood remain in a single corner of France, there will be no tranquillity for us. Therefore, let

us exterminate the Huguenots. To arms, my brethren, to arms !”

A number of voices repeated :

“ To arms ! ”

“ *Par la mordieu !* ” cried Henri, “ try to silence this drunkard, or we ’ll have a second Saint Bartholomew.”

“ Wait, wait,” said Chicot.

And, taking a cane from Quélns, he passed behind the monk and struck him with all his force on the shoulder.

“ Murder ! murder ! ” cried the monk.

“ What ! it ’s you ! ” said Chicot, passing his head under the monk’s arm. “ how goes it, you rogue ? ”

“ Help ! help ! M. Chicot,” cried Gorenflot, “ the enemies of the faith want to assassinate me. But I will not die without making my voice heard. To the fire with the Huguenots ! to the stake with the Béarnais ! ”

“ Will you be silent, you beast ? ”

“ And to the devil with the Gascons ! ” continued the monk.

But at this moment, a second blow, not from a cane, but from a stout cudgel, fell on Gorenflot’s shoulder, who screamed now from real pain.

Chicot looked round him in amazement ; but he saw only the stick. The blow had been given by a man who immediately disappeared in the crowd, after administering this flying correction to Brother Gorenflot.

“ Heaven and earth ! ” cried Chicot, “ who the devil is it that has avenged us Gascons in this summary fashion ? I wonder if he be a child of the country. I must try and find out.”

And he ran after the man with the stick, who was rapidly slipping along the quay, escorted by a single companion.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE RUE DE LA FERRONNERIE.

Chicot had good legs. He would have made the most of them on the present occasion, and have managed to come up with the man who had beaten Gorenflot, if something singular in his appearance, and especially in his companion's, had not suggested that there might be danger in any sudden attempt to find out who they were; for, apparently, they wished to avoid being recognized. Indeed, the two fugitives were plainly trying to get lost in the crowd, turning round only at the street corners to make sure they were not followed.

Chicot thought that, in his case, the best way not to seem to be following them was to precede them. The two men made their way to the Rue Saint-Honoré by the Rue de la Monnaie and the Rue Tirechappe; at the corner of the latter he got ahead of them and continued to run until he found a hiding-place at the end of the Rue des Bourdonnais.

The two men went up the Rue Saint-Honoré. Keeping close to the houses along the corn-market, their hats slouched over their eyes, and their cloaks drawn up over their faces, they marched on, with a quick step in which there was something military, in the direction of the Rue de la Ferronnerie. Chicot continued to have the start of them.

At the corner of the Rue de la Ferronnerie they stopped afresh for a final look around.

During all this time Chicot was still in the lead, and had now reached the middle of the street.

There, in front of a house so old that it seemed falling to pieces, was stationed a litter, drawn by two clumsy-looking horses. A single glance told the Gascon that the driver had fallen asleep on his seat and that a young woman, apparently

anxious, was peering through the blind; the thought flashed through his mind that the litter was waiting for the two men. He stole up behind it, and, protected by his own shadow, as well as by that of the house, he managed to creep under a wide stone bench, used by the green-grocers for the display of their wares twice a week, at which times they had a market in the Rue de la Ferronnerie.

He had just concealed himself when the two men appeared in front of the horses, where they halted, evidently in an uneasy frame of mind.

One of them tried to wake up the coachman, and, as the latter slept like a log, he let fly a *cap dé diou!* at him, in an accent there was no mistaking, while the other, still more impatient, pricked him in the rear with his poniard.

"Oho!" said Chicot, "I was not mistaken, then; they are fellow-countrymen of mine; I am no longer surprised at the dressing Gorenflot received for speaking ill of the Gascons."

The young woman, as soon as she recognized the men she was waiting for, leaned her head quickly out of the window of the heavy machine. When Chicot had a clearer view of her, he saw she must be between twenty and twenty-two; she was very beautiful and very pale, and, if it had been daylight, the dampness of her golden hair, the dark circles round her eyes, the deadly whiteness of her hands, and her air of general languor, would have told the observer that she was in the grasp of a malady of which her frequent swoons and the enlargement of her figure would have very quickly revealed the secret.

But all Chicot perceived was that she was young, fair, and pale.

The two men approached the litter, and so were naturally placed between it and the bench under which the Gascon was crouching.

The taller of them took in both his hands the white hand which the lady stretched out toward him from the litter, resting his foot on one of the steps and his arms on the portière.

"Well, darling," said he, "how is my little heart, my own little pet, to-day?"

The lady answered by shaking her head, with a sad smile, and showing her flask of salts.

"Still those fainting-fits, *centre saint-gris!* How angry I should be with you for being so ill, my love, if I were not the cause myself of your sweet malady!"

"Then why the devil did you bring madame to Paris?" said the other man, rather rudely. "It has been the curse of your whole life that you must have a petticoat tagged on to your doublet wherever you go."

"Ah! my dear Agrippa," answered the man who had spoken first and who was apparently the husband or the lover of the lady. "it is so great a grief to part from one you love."

And the lady and he exchanged looks full of amorous languor.

"*Cordious!* but you do drive me crazy with your talk! you do, upon my soul!" answered his sour comrade. "Did you come to Paris to make love, my fine wooer? I should think Béarn was wide enough for your sentimental promenades, without continuing them in this Babylon, where you have been near getting both our throats cut a score of times to-night. Go back home, if you must spend your time sparking at the curtains of litters; but here, *mordious!* the only intrigues you must deal in are political intrigues, my master."

At the word "master" Chicot would have liked to raise his head; but he could scarcely risk such a movement without being seen.

"Let him growl away, darling, and don't you bother about what he says. I believe he would fall as sick as you are and would have the vapors and swoons you have, too, if he were stopped from growling."

"But, at least, *ventre saint-gris*, to use your own oath," cried his cross-grained comrade, "get into the litter and say your soft things to madame there. You will run less risk of being recognized there than out here in the open street."

"You are right, Agrippa," said the amorous Gascon. "You see, darling, he is not so bad an adviser as he seems. There, make room for me, my love, if, though you are no longer able to take me on your lap, you will allow me to sit by your side."

"Not only do I permit it, sire, but I ardently desire you to do so."

"Sire!" murmured Chicot, who, carried away by a thoughtless impulse, raised his head and bumped it painfully against the sandstone bench, "sire! what does all this mean?"

But during this time, the happy lover profited by the permission granted, and the creaking of the litter announced an increase of its burden.

Then the sound of a lingering, tender kiss succeeded to the creaking.

"*Mordieu*! but man is the stupid animal!" cried his companion, who remained outside the litter.

"Hang me if I understand anything of this!" muttered Chicot. "But I have only to wait: everything comes to him who knows how to wait."

"Ah! how happy I am!" exclaimed the person addressed as "sire," paying not the slightest regard to his friend's impatience, to which he was evidently long accustomed. "*Ventre saint-gris*, but to-day has been the fine day; here are my good Parisians, who detest me with all their souls and would kill me without mercy if they knew where to pounce upon me, here are my Parisians doing their very best to smooth my way to the throne, and I hold in my arms the woman whom I love! Where are we, D'Aubigné? I wish, when I am king, to erect a statue on this very spot to the genius of the Béarnais."

"Of the Béarn" —

Chicot came to a standstill. He had just made a second bump by the first one.

"We are in the Rue de la Ferronnerie, sire, and it smells anything but nice," answered D'Aubigné, who was always in ill-humor, and, when he grew tired of finding fault with men, at once set about finding fault with things.

"It seems to me," continued Henri — for our readers have already doubtless recognized the King of Navarre — "it seems to me that I have a clear vision of the whole course of my life, that I see myself king, seated on the throne, strong and powerful, but, perhaps, less loved than I am at the present moment, and that my eyes can embrace the future, even to the very hour of my death. Ah! my love, tell me again that you love me, for my heart melts at the sound of your voice!"

And the Béarnais, yielding to a feeling of melancholy that sometimes took hold of him, sighed profoundly and let his head fall on his mistress's shoulder.

"Good heaven!" cried the young woman, in alarm, "are you ill, sire?"

"Capital!" said D'Aubigné, "our fine soldier, fine general, and fine king in a fainting-fit!"

"No, darling, do not be frightened," said Henri: "if I were to faint at your side it would be with happiness."

"In good sooth, sire," grumbled D'Aubigné. "I do not

know why you should sign yourself 'Henri de Navarre,' you should sign 'Ronsard' or 'Clement Marot.' *Cordious!* how is it you cannot get along with Madame Margot when you are both so fond of poetry?"

"Ah! D'Aubigné, for mercy's sake do not speak of my wife. *Ventre saint-gris!* speak of — But you know the proverb. What if we happened to run across her?"

"Although she is in Navarre, is she not?"

"*Ventre saint-gris!* am I not there, too? or am I not, at least, thought to be there? Agrippa, you made me shiver all over. Come in here and let us return."

"By my faith, no," said D'Aubigné; "you go on and I'll follow. I should only bore you, and, what is a good deal worse, you would be sure to bore me."

"Well, shut the door, you Béarnais bear, and you can do as you like afterward."

Then, addressing the coachman:

"Lavarenne, you know where!" said he.

The litter moved away slowly, followed by D'Aubigné, who, though he scolded his friend, was determined to watch over his king.

This departure freed Chicot from a terrible apprehension, for, after such a conversation with Henri, D'Aubigne was not the kind of man to let the imprudent person who heard it live.

"Let us see," said Chicot, creeping on all fours from under his bench, "ought I to tell the Valois of what has just occurred?"

And Chicot straightened himself up to banish the stiffness that had got hold of his legs.

"And why should he know it?" continued the Gascon. "Two men in hiding and a woman with child! It would be cowardly. No, I will say nothing; the important point is that I know it myself, since, after all, it is I who really reign."

And Chicot, quite by himself, indulged in a few merry antics.

"There was something taking about the lovers," Chicot went on. "Still, D'Aubigné is right; for a monarch *in partibus*, this dear Henri de Navarre of mine drops into love quite too often. A year ago he returned to Paris, Madame de Sauve being the attraction. To-day he is followed thither by this charming

little creature, who is addicted to swooning. Who the devil can she be? La Fosseuse, probably. And then, I think if Henri de Navarre really and truly and seriously aims at the throne, he should give a few of his thoughts to the task of destroying his enemy the Balafré, his enemy the Cardinal de Guise, and his enemy my own beloved Duc de Mayenne. Well, well, I rather like this Béarnais, and I am pretty sure he will do an ill turn, some day or other, to that odious Lorraine butcher. I have my mind made up; decidedly I am not going to say a word of what I have seen and heard to-day."

At this moment a band of drunken Leaguers passed, howling: "Hurrah for the Mass! Death to the Béarnais! To the stake with Huguenots!"

However, the litter was then turning the corner of the wall of the Holy Innocents Cemetery and was soon lost in the Rue Saint-Denis.

"And now," said Chicot, "let me go over what I have seen: I have seen the Cardinal de Guise, I have seen the Duc de Mayenne, and I have seen King Henri de Navarre; there is only one other prince lacking in my collection, the Duc d'Anjou; I must search every hole and corner until I find him. Now, *centre de biche*! where is my François III.? I have set my heart on getting a glimpse of that illustrious sovereign."

And Chicot started again on the road to the church of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois.

Chicot was not the only one in search of the Duc d'Anjou, or the only one disturbed by his absence. The Guises also were seeking for him on every side, but they were not more successful than M. Chicot. M. d'Anjou was not the man to venture on imprudent risks, and we shall see later on what precautions kept him out of the way of his friends.

Once Chicot thought he had come on him in the Rue Béthisy: a numerous group was standing at the door of a wine-seller's shop, and in this group Chicot recognized M. de Monsoreau and M. de Guise.

"Good," said he, "the remoras are here; the shark ought not to be far off."

Chicot was mistaken. M. de Monsoreau and the Balafré were employed, at the door of a tavern that was gorged with drunkards, in offering bumpers to an orator whose stammering eloquence was being stimulated in this fashion.

This orator was Gorenflot, Gorenflot dead drunk, Gorenflot

relating his journey to Lyons, and his duel in an inn with a horrible emissary of Calvin.

M. de Guise was paying the closest attention; he believed there were certain coincidences between the facts narrated by the speaker and the silence of Nicolas David.

The Rue de Béthisy was at this moment thronged with people. Several gentlemen Leaguers had fastened their horses to a sort of public stable, rather common in most of the streets at this period. Chicot stopped behind the group stationed before this stable and listened.

Gorenflot, tossing backward and forward, incessantly tumbling off Panurge and again steadied in his saddle, Gorenflot speaking only in hiccoughs, but unfortunately speaking all the same, was evidently becoming a plaything in the hands of the duke and M. de Monsoreau, who were drawing out of him scraps of fact, fragments of a confession.

Such a confession filled Chicot with far more terror as he listened than had done the presence of the King of Navarre in the Rue de la Ferronnerie. He felt sure that in another moment Gorenflot would pronounce his name, and that name would light up the entire mystery with a fatal glare. He lost no time, however. In an instant he cut or unfastened the bridles of several horses, and cudgelling a couple of them furiously, sent them galloping and neighing among the crowd, which broke up and scattered in every direction.

Gorenflot was alarmed on account of Panurge; the gentlemen were alarmed on account of their horses and valises, and many were alarmed on account of themselves. The assembly was soon on the run; the cry of "fire!" was raised, repeated by a dozen voices. Chicot passed, quick as lightning, through the different groups, and approaching Gorenflot fastened on him a pair of flaming eyes that almost sobered the monk. He took hold of the bridle of Panurge, and, instead of following the crowd, turned his back on it, so that there was soon a wide space between Gorenflot and the Duc de Guise, a space that was instantly filled by those curious people who always flock where a sensational incident occurs, and generally when it is over.

Then Chicot dragged the monk to the back of a blind alley by the church of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, and propping him and Panurge up against the wall, as a sculptor might have done with a bas-relief, if he desired to incrustate it in stone:

"Ah! you drunkard!" he cried, "you pagan! you traitor and renegade! you will always prefer, then, a jug of wine to your friend, will you?"

"Oh! M. Chicot," stammered the monk.

"What! I feed you, you scoundrel!" continued Chicot, "I liquor you, I fill your pockets and your stomach, and you betray your master!"

"Oh! Chicot," said the monk, moved to tears.

"You betray my secrets, wretch!"

"Dear friend."

"Hold your tongue; you are but a sycophant, and you deserve to be chastised."

And the monk, vigorous and strong, powerful as a bull, but overcome by repentance, and especially by wine, made no defence, and allowed Chicot to shake him as if he were a balloon full of air.

Panurge alone protested against the violence done his master by kicks which reached no one and which Chicot amply repaid with his stick.

"I chastised!" murmured the monk, "your friend chastised, dear M. Chicot!"

"Yes, yes," said Chicot, "and you're going to receive your punishment on the spot."

And in a moment, the Gascon's stick passed from the ass's crupper to the monk's broad and fleshy shoulders.

"Ah! if I were only fasting!" exclaimed Gorenflot, with a gesture of rage.

"You would beat me! beat me, your friend! you ingrate!" said Chicot.

"You my friend, M. Chicot, and yet murder me in this way!"

"Who loveth well, chastiseth well."

"Then, you may as well kill me off at once," cried Gorenflot.

"The very thing I ought to do."

"Oh! if I were but fasting!" repeated the monk, with a deep groan.

"You said that before."

And Chicot redoubled the proofs of his friendship for the poor Genevievean, who began to roar with all his might.

"There! I'm through now, so you and Panurge come along to the *Corne d'Abondance*, where you will be put to bed neatly."

"I cannot see my way," said the monk, from whose eyes big tears were running.

"Ah!" said Chicot, "if you could weep the wine you drank, that might sober you up a little, perhaps. But no; just as usual, I must act as your guide."

And Chicot led the ass by the bridle, while the monk, clinging with both hands to the pommel, made every effort to preserve his centre of gravity.

In this way they crossed the Pont aux Meuniers, the Rue Saint-Barthélemy, the Petit-Pont, and ascended the Rue Saint-Jacques, the monk still weeping and the Gascon still tugging at the bridle.

Two waiters, aided by Maître Bonhomet, on the order of Chicot, helped the monk off his ass and conducted him to the apartment with which our readers are already acquainted.

"It is done," said Maître Bonhomet, returning.

"He's in bed?" asked Chicot.

"He's snoring."

"Splendid! but as he will awake some day or other, remember that I do not wish he should know how he came here; not a word of explanation about the matter to him. It would n't be a bad thing even if he were to believe that he has never been outside here since the famous night when he created such a scandal in his convent, and if he took all that has happened in the interval for a dream."

"As you please, Seigneur Chicot," answered the innkeeper. "What has befallen this poor monk?"

"A great misfortune. It appears that at Lyons he quarrelled with an agent of M. de Mayenne and killed him."

"Great heavens!" cried the host, "so that" —

"So that M. de Mayenne has sworn that he will have him broken alive on the wheel," answered Chicot.

"You may rest easy, monsieur: I'll take care he doesn't leave here under any pretext whatever."

"Nothing can be better, Maître Bonhomet — And now," said the Gascon to himself, "that I have nothing to fear about Gorenflot, I must absolutely find the Duc d'Anjou, and I must set about it at once, too."

And he took his way to the hotel of his majesty François III.

CHAPTER XLII.

PRINCE AND FRIEND.

As we have seen, Chicot searched vainly for the Duc d'Anjou through the streets of Paris on the night of the League.

The Duc de Guise, it will be remembered, had invited the prince to meet him: this invitation had disturbed his suspicious highness. François had reflected, and, when he reflected, François surpassed the serpent in prudence.

However, as his interest required that he should see what took place that evening, he decided at length to accept the invitation, but he was also determined not to put a foot outside his palace unless he were well and duly attended.

As every man who is afraid appeals for help to his favorite weapon, so the duke sought for his sword: now, his sword was Bussy d'Amboise.

The duke must have been seized by strong apprehensions before making up his mind to take that step. Since his deception of Bussy in regard to M. de Monsoreau, Bussy had kept out of his way, and François acknowledged in his heart that, if he were in Bussy's place and were possessed of Bussy's courage, he should have felt more than contempt for a prince who had betrayed him so cruelly.

For that matter, Bussy, like all fine natures, felt pain more keenly than pleasure. It is rare that a man, fearless in the presence of peril, cold and calm when confronting fire and sword, does not give way to grief more readily than a coward. Those from whom a woman can draw tears most easily are those who are most to be feared by men.

Bussy was, in fact, paralyzed by his great sorrow. He had seen Diane received at court, recognized as Comtesse de Monsoreau, admitted by Queen Louise into the circle of her ladies of honor. He had seen a thousand curious eyes riveted on her unrivalled beauty, which he had, so to speak, discovered and rescued from the tomb in which it lay buried. During the whole evening he had kept his eyes fixed on the young woman, who never raised hers, and, throughout all the splendor of that festival, Bussy, unjust, as is every man who truly loves, Bussy, forgetful of the past and destroying in his own mind all the phantoms of happiness to which that past had

given birth, Bussy never asked himself whether she, too, did not suffer from keeping her eyes thus lowered; she who beheld before her a face clouded with sympathizing melancholy amid all those other indifferent or stupidly inquisitive faces.

“Oh!” said Bussy to himself, seeing that it was useless to expect even a glance from her, “women have cleverness and audacity only when they want to deceive a husband, a guardian, or a mother; they are awkward, or cowardly, when they have simply a debt of gratitude to pay; they are so much afraid of seeming to love, they attach such an exaggerated value to their slightest favor, that, in order to drive to despair the man who has for them a reverential love, they do not mind breaking his heart, if the whim seize them. Diane could have said to me frankly: ‘I thank you for what you have done for me, M. de Bussy, but I do not love you.’ The blow would have either killed or cured me. But no, she prefers letting me love her hopelessly; but she has gained nothing thereby, for I no longer love her; I despise her.”

And he departed from the royal circle with rage in his heart.

At this moment, his was no longer that noble face which all women gazed on with love, and all men with terror; the brow was dull, the eye false, the smile sinister.

On passing out, Bussy was suddenly confronted by his own reflection in a large Venetian mirror, and was appalled by that reflection.

“I am mad,” said he; “why, for a woman who disdains me, should I render myself odious to a hundred who think well of me? But why does she disdain me, and for whom?”

“Is it for that long, livid skeleton, who, always by her side, watches her incessantly with his jealous eyes, and who also feigns not to see me? If I wished it, I could, in a quarter of an hour, hold him mute and cold under my knee with ten inches of my sword in his heart; if I wished it, I could splash that white robe with the blood of him who has embroidered it with flowers; if I wished, seeing that I cannot be loved, I might, at least, be feared and hated!”

“Yes! Yes! Her hatred rather than her indifference!”

“Ah! But to act thus would be base and paltry: to act thus would be to act as a Quélus or a Maugiron would act, if a Quélus or a Maugiron knew how to love. Far better to

resemble that hero of Plutarch whom I have admired so much, that young Antiochus dying of love, yet never telling his love, never uttering a complaint. Yes, I will be silent ! Yes, I who have fought hand to hand with the most formidable swordsmen of the age ; I who have seen the brave Crillon himself disarmed before me, and who have held his life at my mercy ; yes, I will crush down my sorrow and stifle it in my soul, as did Hercules with the giant Antheus, never allowing him to touch once with his foot, Hope, his mother. No, nothing is impossible to me. Bussy, who, like Crillon, is surnamed ‘the brave ;’ and all that those heroes have done I will do.”

And, after saying these words, he relaxed the convulsive hands with which he was tearing his breast, wiped the sweat from his forehead, and moved slowly toward the door. He was about to strike rudely at the tapestry ; he preached to himself patience and gentleness, and passed out, a smile on his lips, calmness on his brow, a volcano in his heart.

It is true that, meeting the Duc d’Anjou on his path, he turned away his head, for he felt that, with all his firmness of soul, he could not go so far as to smile on, and even salute, the prince who had so shamefully betrayed him.

When passing, the prince uttered the name of Bussy, but Bussy ignored him.

Bussy returned home. He placed his sword on the table, drew his poniard from its sheath, unfastened his cloak and doublet, and sat down in a large armchair, resting his head on the coat of arms that adorned its back.

His attendants saw that he was lost in thought ; they believed he wished to rest, and retired.

Bussy did not sleep : he dreamed.

He spent several hours in this fashion, unwitting that, at the other end of the room, a man, seated like himself, was observing him keenly, without making a single gesture, without uttering a single word, waiting, in all probability, for some excuse to enter into relations with him.

At length an icy shiver shook Bussy’s shoulders and gave a wandering look to his eyes ; the observer did not move.

Soon the count’s teeth chattered, his arms stiffened, his head, growing too heavy, slipped along the back of the chair, and fell upon his shoulder.

Immediately, the man who was examining him rose up with a profound sigh and approached him.

"M. le Comte," said he, "you have a fever."

The count raised his head, empurpled by the fever's heat.

"Ah! it is you, Rémy," said he.

"Yes, count, I was waiting for you here."

"Here, and why?"

"Because a man does not stay long where he suffers."

"Thanks, my friend," said Bussy, taking the young man's hand.

Rémy held in his own hands that terrible hand, now weaker than a child's, and pressed it affectionately and respectfully to his heart.

"Now, M. le Comte," said he, "the question is whether you wish to remain in your present condition or not. Do you desire this fever to gain entire control of you? Then you may stay up. Do you desire to get the better of it? Then you must go to bed and have some fine book read to you from which you will draw example and strength."

The count had nothing in the world to do except obey; he obeyed.

It was, therefore, in bed that all his friends who came to see him found him.

During the whole of the following day Rémy never left the count's bedside. He exercised a double function, that of physician for the body and that of physician for the soul. For the one he had refreshing drinks; for the other, soft words.

But on the following day, the day on which M. de Guise came to the Louvre, Bussy looked round him; Rémy was not there.

"He is worn out, poor boy!" thought Bussy, "and it is quite natural in one for whom air, sunlight, the springtime, must be necessities; and then, doubtless Gertrude was expecting him. Gertrude is only a maid-servant, but she loves him — A maid-servant who loves is higher than a queen who does not love."

The day passed and Rémy did not appear. His very absence made Bussy long for his presence; he began to feel angry and impatient.

"Ah!" he murmured, "and I who still believed in gratitude and friendship! Henceforth I will believe in nothing."

Toward evening, when the streets were filling up and every sort of rumor was flying around, when the disappearance of daylight rendered it impossible to distinguish objects in his

apartment. Bussy heard loud and numerous voices in the ante-chamber.

A servant ran in, terrified.

"The Due d'Anjou, monseigneur," said he.

"Show him in," answered Bussy, frowning at the thought that his master should trouble himself about him; that master whom he so thoroughly despised.

The duke entered. Bussy's chamber was unlighted. When hearts are sick they love darkness, for they can people the darkness with phantoms.

"It is too dark here, Bussy," said the duke, "you must find it unpleasant."

Bussy was silent; disgust closed his lips.

"Are you so seriously ill, then," continued the duke, "that you do not answer?"

"Yes, I am very ill, monseigneur," murmured Bussy.

"That is the reason, I suppose. I have not seen you for the last couple of days?" said the duke.

"Yes, monseigneur," answered Bussy.

The prince, piqued at these short answers, took two or three turns round the room, looking at the sculptures that stood out in the dim light, and handling the tapestry.

"You are well lodged, at least in my opinion," said the duke.

Bussy made no reply.

"Gentlemen," said the duke to his attendants, "pray remain in the next room; you see my poor Bussy is decidedly ill. But why has not Miron been sent for? The doctor of a king is not too good for Bussy."

A servant of Bussy shook his head; the duke noticed the movement.

"Come, Bussy, is anything preying on your spirits?" asked the duke, almost obsequiously.

"I do not know," answered the count.

The prince stole near him, like one of those rebuffed lovers, who, the more he is rebuffed, becomes the more insinuating and caressing.

"Now, now, Bussy, speak to me," said he.

"And what am I to say, monseigneur?"

"You are angry with me, are you not?" said the prince, in a low tone.

"I angry! why? Besides, it is of no use to be angry with princes. What good could it do?"

The duke was silent.

"But," said Bussy, "we are wasting time in preambles. To the point, monseigneur."

The duke looked at Bussy.

"You have need of me, have you not?" said the latter, harshly.

"Oh, M. de Bussy!"

"I repeat it, you have need of me, beyond a doubt. Do you fancy I believe your visit prompted by friendship. No, *pardieu!* for you love nobody."

"Oh, Bussy! you to say such things to me!"

"Come, let us have an end of it; speak, monseigneur; what do you want? When you happen to serve a prince and this prince practises upon you to the point of even calling you his friend, of course you ought to be grateful to him for his dissimulation and make every sacrifice for his sake, even that of your life. Speak."

The duke blushed; but it was dark, and no one saw the blush.

"I wanted nothing of you, Bussy," said he, "and you are mistaken if you think my visit interested. I desire only, seeing what fine weather we're having and that all Paris is out to sign the League, that we might take a little stroll together through the city."

Bussy looked at the duke.

"Have you not Aurilly?" said he.

"A lute-player!"

"Ah, monseigneur! you do not give him all his titles; I was under the impression he performed other offices for your highness. Moreover, you have ten or twelve other gentlemen whose swords I hear clanking on the floor of my antechamber."

The hangings were raised slowly.

"Who is there?" asked the duke, haughtily, "and who dares to come into a room in which I happen to be, unannounced?"

"I, Rémy," answered the young man, entering coolly, and showing no embarrassment whatever.

"Who is Rémy?" inquired the prince.

"Rémy, monseigneur," replied the young man, "is the doctor."

"Rémy," said Bussy, "is more than a doctor, monseigneur, he is a friend."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the duke, in a tone of wounded feeling.

"You heard what monseigneur wishes, did you?" asked Bussy, preparing to get out of bed.

"Yes, about having a little stroll together, but" —

"But what?" said the duke.

"But he must not go, monseigneur," answered Le Haudouin.

"And why so?" inquired François.

"Because it is too cold outside, monseigneur."

"Too cold?" said the duke, astonished that any one should dare to resist him.

"Yes, too cold, and, consequently, I who am responsible for M. de Bussy to his friends, and particularly to myself, forbid him to go out."

All this, however, would not have prevented Bussy from jumping out of bed had not the hand of Rémy met his in a significant clasp.

"Very well," said the duke. "If he runs so great a risk by going out, he can stay at home."

And his highness, exasperated to the highest degree, took two steps toward the door.

Bussy did not stir.

The duke returned to the bed.

"So," said he, "your mind is made up, you will not run the risk?"

"You see for yourself, monseigneur," answered Bussy, "the doctor forbids it."

"You ought to see Miron, Bussy; Miron is a great doctor."

"Monseigneur, I prefer a doctor who is my friend to a doctor who is a great doctor."

"In that case, adieu."

"Adieu, monseigneur."

And the duke went out with a great noise.

As soon as he was gone, Rémy, who had followed him with his eyes until he made sure he had left the hotel, ran up to his patient.

"And now, monseigneur," said he, "you must get up, and that immediately."

"Get up! Why?"

"To take a walk with me. It's too warm in this room."

"But you said awhile ago to the duke that it was too cold outside!"

"The temperature has changed since he left."

"So that" — said Bussy, sitting up and looking at him inquisitively.

"So that at present," answered Rémy, "I am convinced the air would do you good."

"I do not understand," said Bussy.

"Do you understand anything about the potions I am giving you? That does not prevent you swallowing them, however. Come, come, up with you at once. A walk with the Duc d'Anjou was dangerous; with the doctor it will be beneficial, and the doctor himself tells you so. Have you lost confidence in me? Then you had better send me away."

"All right," said Bussy, "since you wish it."

"I require it."

Bussy rose, pale and trembling.

"What an interesting paleness!" said Rémy, "what a handsome invalid!"

"But where are we going?"

"To a quarter the air of which I analyzed this very day, even."

"And this air?"

"Is sovereign for your disease, monseigneur."

Bussy dressed.

"My hat and sword," he said.

He donned the one and belted on the other.

Then the two passed out.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ETYMOLOGY OF THE RUE DE LA JUSSIENNE.

RÉMY took his patient by the arm, turned to the left, entered the Rue Coquillière, and followed it as far as the rampart.

"It is strange," said Bussy, "you are leading me in the direction of the marsh of the Grange-Batelière; do you think that quarter to be healthful?"

"Oh, monsieur, a little patience," said Rémy; "we are going to turn round by the Rue Pagevin, leave on our right the Rue Breneuse, and enter the Rue Montmartre; you have no idea what a fine street is the Rue Montmartre."

"Do you imagine I am not well acquainted with it?"

"Oh, if you are acquainted with it, so much the better. I shan't have to waste my time pointing out its beauties, and, instead, I'll lead you at once into another pretty little street. So come along, that's all I have to say to you."

And, in fact, after leaving the Pont Montmartre on their left and walking about two hundred paces in the street, Rémy turned to the right.

"Why," cried Bussy, "you seem to have made up your mind to return to the point from which we started."

"This," answered Rémy, "is the Rue de la Gypécienne, or Égyptienne, just as you wish, a street the people are already beginning to call 'Rue de la Gysienne,' and which they will call before long 'Rue de la Jussienne,' because it is softer, and the tendency of languages, the further you advance southward, is to multiply vowels. Surely you, who have been in Poland, monseigneur, ought to be aware of this. You know the rascals never boggle at their four successive consonants, so that, when they speak, you fancy they are crunching pebbles and swearing while they're crunching them."

"What you say is right enough," said Bussy; "but as I can hardly believe you have brought me here to lecture me on philology, tell me, in the name of goodness, where are we going?"

"Do you see yon little church?" was Rémy's sole answer. "Do you notice what a stately air it has, monseigneur, with its front on the street, and its apsis on the garden of the community? I would be ready to wager that you never remarked it before."

"In good truth," said Bussy, "I don't know that I did."

And Bussy was not the only great lord who had never entered this church of Sainte Marie l'Égyptienne, a church much loved by the common people, and also known among them as the Chapelle Quoqhéron.

"Well," said Rémy, "now that you know its name, monseigneur, and that you have made a sufficient examination of the exterior, what do you say if we enter and have a look at the stained-glass windows in the nave: they are rather curious."

Bussy turned his eyes on Le Haudouin. There was such a sweet smile on the young man's face that Bussy at once came to the conclusion he had some other object in drawing him into the church than showing him stained-glass windows, which he could not see in any case, as it was night.

There was, however, something else to see, for the interior of the church was lit up for the celebration of the office of the Blessed Virgin. There were some of those artless pictures of the sixteenth century, many of which Italy, thanks to her fine climate, has been enabled to still preserve, while amongst us, humidity on one side, and vandalism on the other, have effaced those traditions of the past, those evidences of a faith that exists no longer. The artist had painted in fresco for François I., and by his orders, the life of Saint Mary of Egypt. Now, among the most interesting incidents of that life, the painter, being a simple-minded man and also a great lover of truth, of truth historical, though, perhaps, not of truth anatomical, had, in the most prominent part of the chapel, illustrated the critical moment when Saint Mary, not having any money to pay the boatman, offers herself as a substitute for it.

It is but just, however, to say that, notwithstanding the veneration of the faithful for Mary the Egyptian, after her conversion, many honest women of the quarter thought the painter ought to have put this particular picture in some other place, or at least have treated his subject in a less veracious fashion; and the reason they gave, or rather did not give, was that certain details in the fresco attracted too often the attention of the young shop-boys who were forced by their masters to attend church on Sundays and holy days.

Bussy looked at Le Haudonin, who, having become a shop-boy for the nonce, was regarding this picture with great interest.

"Do you really imagine, now," said he, "you will kindle anacreontic fancies in my mind with your chapel of Saint Mary of Egypt? If you do, you have mistaken your man. You ought to have taken monks or students with you."

"God forbid!" answered Le Haudonin: "*Omnis cogitatio libidinosa cerebrum infecit.*"

"Well, then, what is your purpose?"

"Faith, although the place is a little dark, I think you ought to be able to see it plainly enough."

"Come, now; surely you had some other object in dragging me here than that of showing me Saint Mary's knees?"

"No, upon my word," said Rémy.

"Then I have seen all I want to see; let us leave."

"Wait awhile," said Rémy. "The office is nearly over; if we were to leave now we should disturb the congregation."

And he gently detained Bussy by taking hold of his arm.

"Ah, they are going now," continued Rémy, after a few seconds; "suppose we do as the others."

Bussy moved toward the door, visibly indifferent and absent-minded.

"What!" exclaimed Le Haudouin, "leaving the church without taking holy water? Why, really, you must be losing your wits."

Bussy walked as obediently as a child to the column within which lay the holy water font.

Le Haudouin seized the opportunity to make a sign of intelligence to a woman who, as soon as she noticed the gesture, proceeded immediately to the same column to which Bussy was going.

So it happened that at the very moment the count was stretching out his hand toward the font, which was in the form of a shell and supported by two Egyptians in black marble, another hand, somewhat large and red, but a woman's, for all that, met his own, and touched it with the purifying liquid.

Bussy could not help raising his eyes from the large, red hand to the woman's face; but as soon as he did so he recoiled and turned pale, for in the hand's owner he recognized Gertrude, half disguised by a thick black woolen veil.

He remained in the same attitude, his arm extended, forgetting to make the sign of the cross, while Gertrude passed him with a bow and vanished through the porch.

Two steps behind Gertrude, whose vigorous arms elbowed a path for her, went a woman carefully wrapped in a silk mantilla, whose youthful, elegant lines, charming foot, and delicate figure reminded him that there was only one other person in the world who could boast of similar possessions.

Rémy looked at him silently; Bussy now understood why the young man had brought him to the Rue Sainte-Marie l'Égyptienne, and into the church.

Bussy followed the woman and Le Haudouin followed Bussy.

It would have been amusing to watch those four figures marching behind one another with measured tread, did not the paleness and sadness of two of them bear witness to cruel suffering.

Gertrude, still in front, turned the corner of the Rue Montmartre, advanced a few yards along the street, and then



UPON A LITTLE WOODEN BENCH BACKED AGAINST THE CHURCH WALL
SAT DIANE.

suddenly passed into an alley on the right, which was closed up by a house at the end.

Bussy paused.

"I say, M. le Comte," asked Rémy, "do you wish me to tread on your heels?"

Bussy went on.

Gertrude, in advance as usual, drew a key from her pocket and opened the door of the house. Her mistress passed her, and entered, without turning her head.

Rémy said a few words to the servant, drew aside, and let Bussy pass him. Then he and Gertrude entered in turn, bolted the door, and the blind alley was once more deserted.

It was half-past seven in the evening, and near the beginning of May; caressed by the genial mildness of the air, the leaves were already beginning to expand within their bursting sheaths.

Bussy looked around him; he was in a little garden about fifty feet square, surrounded by very high walls, the summit of which was clothed with vines and ivy; from time to time the growing young shoots sent little particles of plaster falling, and gave to the breeze that strong, pungent perfume which the freshness of the night-time always extracts from their leaves.

Long gilly-flowers, merrily darting out of the chinks in the old church wall, made a brave show with their buds red as unalloyed copper.

The first lilacs which had flowered in the morning sun also fluttered the young man's still unsettled brain with their sweet emanations; he wondered if all those perfumes, all this warmth and life, had not come to him, so weak and forlorn hardly an hour ago, solely because of the presence of the woman he so tenderly loved.

Under a bower of jasmine and clematis, upon a little wooden bench backed against the church wall, sat Diane, with drooping head and arms hanging inert by her sides, bruising between her fingers a wall-flower, the leaves of which she was unconsciously breaking off and scattering on the sand.

At that moment a nightingale, concealed in a neighboring chestnut, burst into its long and doleful song, which it modulated at intervals with the most intricate and soul-subduing variations.

Bussy was alone in this garden with Madame de Monsoreau,

for Rémy and Gertrude kept at a distance. He approached her : Diane raised her head.

“ M. le Comte,” said she, in a timid voice, “ all dissimulation would be unworthy of us both : if you found me at the church of Sainte-Marie l’Égyptienne, it was not chance that brought you thither.”

“ No, madame,” said Bussy, “ it was Le Haulouin who induced me to leave my hotel without telling his object, and I swear to you I was ignorant ”—

“ You mistake the meaning of my words, monsieur,” said Diane, sadly. “ Yes, I knew it was M. Rémy led you to the church — by force, perhaps ? ”

“ Madame,” answered Bussy, “ it was not by force. I did not know whom I was to see there.”

“ That is harsh language, M. le Comte,” murmured Diane, shaking her head and looking at Bussy with eyes that were moist with tears. “ Do you mean that, if you had been aware of Rémy’s secret, you would not have accompanied him ? ”

“ Oh, madame ! ”

“ It is quite natural and proper. Monsieur, you did me a great service, and I have never yet thanked you for your courtesy. Pardon me, and accept my most heartfelt thanks.”

“ Madame ! ”

Bussy came to a dead stop. He was so stunned that he could neither find words nor ideas.

“ But I wished to prove to you,” continued Diane, growing more animated, “ that I am not an ungrateful woman, that I have a heart that can recollect. It was I who requested M. Rémy to procure me the honor of this interview, and appointed this place for our meeting. Forgive me if I have displeased you.”

Bussy laid a hand upon his heart.

“ Oh, madame ! ” said he, “ you surely do not think that ! ”

Ideas were beginning to come back to this poor broken heart, and it seemed as if the soft evening breeze that had brought with it such sweet perfumes and tender words was dispelling the clouds that dulled his vision.

“ I know,” resumed Diane, who was the stronger of the two, because she had prepared herself for this interview, “ I know how much trouble you have taken in fulfilling my commission. I know all your delicacy, both know and appreciate it, you may rest assured. Imagine, then, what must have been my

sufferings at the thought that you may have misunderstood the feelings of my heart."

"Madame," said Bussy, "for the last three days I have been ill."

"Yes. I am aware of it," answered Diane, with a blush that betrayed all her interest in that illness, "and I suffered more than you, for M. Rémy, who deceived me, no doubt, led me to believe" —

"That your forgetfulness was the cause of my suffering. Ah! it is true."

"For that reason, I have felt it my duty to do as I am doing, count," continued Madame de Monsoreau, "to thank you for your devoted care and assure you of my eternal gratitude. Do you believe that I am now speaking from the very depths of my heart?"

Bussy shook his head sadly and did not answer.

"Do you doubt my words?" inquired Diane.

"Madame," answered Bussy, "those who experience a feeling of kindness for a person display that kindness in the best way they can: you knew I was at the palace on the night of your presentation at court; you knew I was before you and must have felt my gaze riveted on your person, and yet you never raised your eyes to meet mine; not by a single word, not by a single gesture, not by a single sign, did you let me know you were aware that I was there. But, perhaps, I am wrong; perhaps you did not recognize me; you had only seen me twice."

Diane's answer was a look of such sad reproach that Bussy was stirred by it in the very inmost recesses of his soul.

"Forgive me, madame," said he, "forgive me; you are not like other women, and yet you act like ordinary women. This marriage?"

"Do you not know why I was forced to conclude it?"

"Yes, but it was so easy to break it."

"It was impossible, on the contrary."

"But did nothing tell you that you had near you a man ready to devote his life to your interests?"

Diane lowered her eyes.

"It was that, especially, that frightened me," said she.

"And it was to such considerations as these that you sacrificed me! Ah! do you dream what sort of a life mine must be, now that you belong to another?"

"Monsieur," said the countess, with dignity, "I am determined that the honor of the name I bear shall not be imperilled."

"The name of Monsoreau, which, I suppose, you have taken from choice."

"You think so!" stammered Diane. "So much the better!"

Her eyes filled with tears, her head dropped again on her breast, and Bussy, moved by the sight, walked up and down in great agitation.

"Well, madame," said he, "I have now become what I was before, a stranger to you."

"Alas!" said Diane.

"Your silence is enough to tell me so."

"I can only speak by my silence."

"Your silence, madame, is the continuation of your reception of me at the Louvre. At the Louvre you would not see me; here you will not speak to me."

"At the Louvre I was in the presence of M. de Monsoreau, under the eyes of M. de Monsoreau, and he is jealous."

"Jealous! Great God! Whose happiness can he envy, then, when everybody envies his?"

"I tell you he is jealous, monsieur; for some few days he has seen a person rambling round our new building."

"Then you have left the little house in the Rue Sainte-Antoine?"

"What!" cried Diane, carried away by an unguarded impulse, "then it was not you?"

"Madame, since the announcement of your marriage, since your presentation at the Louvre, in short, ever since you did not deign to honor me with a glance, I have been in bed, devoured by the fever of which I am dying. You must see, therefore, that your husband cannot be jealous of me, since I am not the person he has found prowling about his house."

"Well, monsieur, if it be true, as you have just told me, that you felt some desire to see me again, you may thank this stranger, for, knowing M. de Monsoreau as I know him, this man frightened me on your account, and I wished to say to you: 'Do not expose yourself thus, do not render me even more unhappy than I am already.'"

"You need not be alarmed, madame; I assure you it was not I."

"And now, let me finish all I had to say. From dread of this man whom I do not know, but whom, perhaps, M. de Monsoreau knows, he requires me to leave Paris, so that," added Diane, holding out her hand to Bussy, "you may consider this conversation, M. le Comte, as our last. To-morrow I start for Méridor."

"You start for Méridor, madame?" cried Bussy.

"It is the only means of reassuring M. de Monsoreau," said Diane; "it is the only means of regaining my tranquillity. Besides, I detest Paris, I detest society, the court, the Louvre. I am glad to have a chance of being alone amid the memories of my girlhood. It seems to me as if, by going back to the thoughts of my early years, a little of my past happiness might drop on my head as a refreshing dew. My father accompanies me, and I shall meet M. and Madame de Saint-Luc yonder; they regret I am not near them. Adieu, M. de Bussy."

Bussy covered his face with his hands.

"So be it!" he murmured, "then all is over for me."

"What is that you say?" cried Diane, rising.

"I say, madame, that this man who exiles you, who wrests from me my last remaining hope, the hope of breathing the air you breathe, of catching a glimpse of you occasionally, of touching your robe as you pass, in short, of adoring a living being and not a shadow, I say that this man is my mortal enemy, and that, though I were to perish in the attempt, I will destroy this man with my own hands!"

"Oh! M. le Comte!"

"The wretch!" cried Bussy, "what! was it not enough he should have for wife the chastest and loveliest of human beings? No, he must be jealous in addition! He jealous! would this ridiculous and devouring monster want everything?"

"Ah! be calm, count! be calm! Good heavens! perhaps he is to be excused."

"Excused! do you defend him, madame?"

"Oh, if you knew!" said Diane, covering her face with her hands, as if, in spite of the darkness, he could see her blushes.

"If I knew?" repeated Bussy. "Ah, madame, I know only one thing—he who is your husband should think of nothing in the world except you."

"But," said Diane, in a broken voice, "if you were mistaken, M. le Comte, and if he were not my husband!"

And, after uttering these words, the young woman, lightly touching with her cold hand the burning hand of Bussy, rose and fled, light as a shadow, into one of the sombre pathways of the little garden, seized Gertrude's arm, and disappeared with her, before Bussy, mad, intoxicated, wild with delight, had time even to stretch out his arms and detain her.

He uttered a cry and staggered to his feet.

Rémy arrived barely in time to catch him in his arms and place him sitting on the bench which Diane had just left.

CHAPTER XLIV.

HOW D'ÉPERNON HAD A TORN DOUBLET AND HOW SCHOMBERG WAS DYED BLUE.

WHILE Maître La Hurière was piling up signatures on top of signatures, while Chieot was entrusting Gorenflot to the safe-keeping of the *Corne d'Abondance*, while Bussy was returning to life in that blessed little garden, so full of perfumes, songs, and love, Henri, depressed by what he had witnessed in the city, angered by the preaching he had heard in the churches, furious at the mysterious compliments paid his brother Anjou, whom he had seen passing before him in the Rue Sainte-Honoré, attended by Guise and Mayenne, with a whole suite of gentlemen apparently under the command of M. de Monsoreau, — Henri, we say, was returning to the Louvre in company with Maugiron and Quélus.

The King, as usual, had set out with his four friends; but when within a few yards of the Louvre, Schomberg and D'Épernon, bored by the King's evident ill-humor, and reckoning that on such a turbulent night there must be room for pleasure and adventures, took advantage of the first brawl and disappeared at the corner of the Rue de l'Astruce.

So, while the King and his two friends went on their way along the quay, they allowed themselves to be carried along the Rue d'Orléans.

Before they had advanced a hundred steps they were in the thick of the adventures they were seeking. D'Épernon had

passed his cane between the legs of a citizen and tripped him up, sending him rolling several yards beyond him, and Schomberg had snatched off the cap of a woman he thought old, but who turned out to be young and pretty.

Both, however, had selected the wrong day for making an assault on these worthy Parisians, a class ordinarily so patient. The streets were full of that fever of revolt that suddenly sweeps on occasions through a great capital; the citizen who had been laid on his beam ends was soon on his feet, crying: "Death to the heretic!" He was a zealot, as may easily be imagined, and he rushed on D'Épernon; the woman who had lost her cap cried: "Death to the minion!" a more dangerous cry still; and her husband, who was a dyer, let loose his apprentices on Schomberg.

Schomberg was brave; he halted, spoke haughtily, and clapped his hand on his sword.

D'Épernon was prudent; he fled.

Henri had not been particularly anxious about his two minions. He knew that both of them generally managed to extricate themselves from any difficulty they tumbled into; the one by the aid of his legs, the other by that of his arms. He had then had his ramble, as we have seen, and again entered the Louvre.

He was in his armory, seated in his huge elbow chair, trembling with impatience, seeking for some good pretext to get into a rage.

Maugiron was playing with Narcisse, the King's big greyhound.

Quélus, with his hands pressed against his cheeks, was squatting on a cushion and gazing up at Henri.

"They are always going on in this way," said the King, "always plotting. At one time tigers, at another, serpents; when they do not bound they creep."

"Hang it, sire!" answered Quélus, "do you not always have plots in a kingdom? What the devil would kings' sons and kings' brothers and kings' cousins have to do if they could n't plot?"

"Hold your tongue. Quélus: what with your absurd maxims and big, puffed cheeks, you are a good deal more like a mountebank at the fair of Saint Laurence than a politician."

Quélus whirled round on the cushion and irreverently turned his back on the King.

"Come, now, Maugiron, am I right or am I wrong? Do you think it right to cajole me with rignarole and twaddle as if I were a commonplace king, or a draper, afraid of losing his pet cat?"

"Zounds! sire," answered Maugiron, who was always on the side of Quélus, "if you are not a commonplace king, show it by proving yourself a great king. What the devil! look at Narcisse there, he's a good dog, a good-natured beast; but you just pull his ears, and see how he growls; you just tread on his paws, and see how he bites."

"Good!" said Henri. "now the other one compares me to a dog."

"No, sire, not by any manner of means," answered Maugiron, "if my words mean anything, they mean that I place Narcisse far above you, for Narcisse knows how to defend himself and you don't."

And he, too, turned his back on Henri.

"Oh, very well!" said the King, "so now I am alone. Oh, very well, go on as you are going, my worthy friends, upon whom I am accused of wasting the revenues of my kingdom. Abandon, insult, murder me; I have none but murderers around my person. I give you my word of honor. Ah, Chicot! my poor Chicot! where art thou?"

"Good!" cried Quélus, "that was all there was wanting! He's calling for Chicot now!"

"Oh, it's not surprising," answered Maugiron.

And the insolent fellow mumbled a certain Latin proverb which may be translated: "*A man is known by his company.*"

Henri frowned darkly, a flash of terrible anger illuminated his great black eyes, and, for a moment, the look with which he regarded his indiscreet friends was the look befitting a king.

But exhausted, doubtless, by this passing gleam of anger, the King fell back in his chair, and began rubbing his ear with one of the little puppies out of his basket.

At the same instant a quick step resounded in the ante-chamber, and D'Épernon appeared, without hat or cloak, and with his doublet all torn.

Quélus and Maugiron turned around, and Narcisse ran up, snapping at the newcomer, as if the only thing he recognized about the King's courtiers was their garb.

"Jesus!" cried Henri; "what has happened to you?"

"Sire," answered D'Épernon, "look at me. This is the way in which your Majesty's friends are treated."

"And who has treated you thus?" asked the King.

"*Mordieu!* your people, or rather, the Duc d'Anjou's people, who cried: 'Long live the League! long live the Mass! long live Guise! long live François!' — long live everybody, in short, except the King!"

"And what did you do to them to have them treat you in this manner?"

"I? nothing. What do you fancy I should think of doing to a whole people? They saw I was a friend of your Majesty, and that was enough for them."

"But Schomberg?"

"What about Schomberg?"

"Did not Schomberg come to your help? Did not Schomberg defend you?"

"*Corbœuf!* Schomberg had enough to do to defend himself."

"How was that?"

"I left him in the grip of a dyer, whose wife's cap he had snatched off, and of five or six of his apprentices. I'm afraid he is going to have a hard time of it."

"*Par la mordieu!*" cried Henri; "and where did you leave my poor Schomberg? I will go myself to his aid," said he, rising. "People may say, and with a good deal of truth," added the King, looking at Maugiron and Quélus, "that my friends forsake me; but, at least, no one shall ever be able to say that I forsake my friends."

"Thanks, sire," said a voice behind Henri, "thanks, but I am here, *Gott verdamme mir*, got clear of them without help, but, certainly, not without trouble."

"Schomberg! it's Schomberg's voice!" cried the three minions. "But where the devil are you, Schomberg?"

"*Pardieu!* where I am, you can see me easily enough," exclaimed the same voice.

And from the dark corner of the apartment there advanced, not a man, but a shadow.

"Schomberg!" cried the King, "where have you come from, and why are you of that color?"

In fact, Schomberg, from head to foot, all over, both in every particle of his person and his garments, was of the most beautiful shade of royal blue that can be imagined.

"*Der Teufel!*" he exclaimed; "the wretches! I am no longer surprised every one ran after me."

"But what has happened?" said Henri: "if you had turned yellow, I could have explained it: it might have been the effect of fear; but blue!"

"They steeped me in a vat, the rascals! I thought at first they had soaked me in a tub of water, but it was a vat of indigo."

"*Oh, mordieu!*" said Quélus, roaring, "their sin, then, is their punishment. Indigo comes very high, and you must have carried away at least twenty crowns' worth on you!"

"Oh, yes, it's easy for you to joke. I wish I could have seen you in my place."

"And you have n't ripped up any of them?" asked Maugiron.

"I left my poniard somewhere, up to the hilt in a scabbard of flesh; but, in a minute, all was over: I was seized, lifted up, carried off, dipped in the vat, and almost drowned."

"And how did you get out of their hands?"

"By having the courage to act like a coward, sire."

"And what did you do?"

"I cried: 'Long live the League!'"

"Just like what I did," said D'Épernon, "only I cried: 'Long live the Duc d'Anjou!'"

"And so did I," said Schomberg, biting his lips; "they forced me to shout the very same words. But that is not the worst of it."

"What!" exclaimed the King, "did they make you shout anything else, my poor Schomberg?"

"No, they didn't make me shout anything else; it was quite enough as it was, God knows! But, just as I was crying, 'Long live the Duc d'Anjou!'" —

"Well?"

"Guess who was passing."

"How could I guess?"

"Bussy, that damned Bussy of his, and he heard me hurrahing for his master."

"Oh, he couldn't have understood what the row was about," said Quélus.

"Oh, no! couldn't have understood! when he saw me up to my neck in a vat, with a dagger at my throat!"

"Surely," said Maugiron, "he must have come to your help? It's a duty one gentleman owes to another."

"He? He appeared to be too busy thinking of something else. He was flying as if he had wings; he scarcely touched the ground with his feet."

"And besides," said Maugiron, "he may not have recognized you, perhaps?"

"As if that were likely!"

"You were blue at the time, then?"

"I should say I was!"

"Oh, in that case we must excuse him," observed Henri; "for, to tell the truth, I did not know you myself, my poor Schomberg."

"Never mind," answered the young man, whose coolness on the occasion gave token of his German origin, "we'll meet yet somewhere else than at the corner of the Rue Coquillière, and when that day comes I won't be in a vat, either."

"As far as I am concerned," said D'Épernon, "it is the master I should like to chastise, not the lackey; I want to deal with Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou and not with Bussy."

"Yes, yes," cried Schomberg, "with the Duc d'Anjou, who would kill us with ridicule before killing us with a dagger."

"With the Duc d'Anjou, whose praises every one is singing in the streets. You heard them, sire," said Quélus and Maugiron together.

"The fact is that it is he who is now master over Paris, and not the King; you just take a walk in the streets, sire," said D'Épernon, "and you'll see whether the people respect you a whit more than they do us."

"Ah! my brother, my brother!" muttered Henri, in a menacing tone.

"Oh, yes, sire," said Schomberg, "you cry often enough: 'my brother! my brother!' but you never adopt any measures against this same brother, and yet I am as sure as I can be that this brother of yours is at the head of a conspiracy against you."

"*Mordieu!* it is just what I was saying to these gentlemen when you entered, D'Épernon," cried Henri, "but they answered me with a shrug and turned their backs on me."

"Sire," said Maugiron, "we answered with a shrug and turned our backs on you, not because you said there was a con-

spiracy, but because we saw you had no intention of crushing that conspiracy."

"And now," continued Quélus, "we turn round again and say to you: 'Save us, sire, or rather, save yourself, for with our fall comes your death. To-morrow M. de Guise appears at the Louvre; to-morrow he will ask you to name a chief for the League; to-morrow you will name the Duc d'Anjou as you have promised; and then, with the Duc d'Anjou at the head of the League, that is to say, at the head of a hundred thousand Parisians, inflamed by the orgies of this night, the Duc d'Anjou can do whatever he likes with you.'"

"Ah!" said Henri, "so then, if I make up my mind to take some decisive step, you are resolved to support me?"

"Yes, sire," answered the young men in unison.

"Only, sire," said D'Épernon, "you must give me time to put on another cap, cloak, and doublet."

"We're about the same height," answered Henri. "Pass into my wardrobe; my valet will furnish you with what you want."

"And you must give me time, sire, for a bath," said Schomberg.

"Pass into my bathroom, Schomberg; my attendant will take care of you."

"Sire," said Schomberg, "we may be in hopes, then, that this insult will not remain unavenged?"

Henri made a sign with his hand for silence, and dropping his head on his breast, appeared to be reflecting profoundly.

After a few moments, he said, "Quélus, find out if M. d'Anjou has returned to the Louvre."

Quélus passed out. D'Épernon and Schomberg waited for the answer of Quélus, their zeal revived to the highest point by the imminence of danger. It is not during a tempest but during a calm that sailors become mutinous.

"Sire," asked Maugiron, "is your Majesty, then, about to take the decisive step you mentioned?"

"You'll soon know," answered the King.

Quélus returned.

"M. le Duc has not yet returned," said he.

"It is well," answered the King. "D'Épernon, go and change your clothes, and you, Schomberg, go and change your color. Do you, Quélus and Maugiron, go down to the window, and keep watch until my brother returns."

"And when he returns?" asked Quélus.

"When he returns, order all the gates to be closed. Go."

"Bravo, sire!" said Quélus.

"Sire," said D'Épernon, "I will be back in ten minutes."

"I cannot tell when I shall be back," said Schomberg. "It will depend on the nature of the dye."

"Come as soon as you can," answered Henri. "That is all I have to say to you."

"But will your Majesty remain alone?" inquired Maugiron.

"No, Maugiron, I remain with God, and am about to ask him to protect our enterprise."

"Pray to him earnestly, sire," said Quélus, "for I am beginning to believe he has an understanding with the devil to damn us all together in this world as well as in the next."

"Amen!" said Maugiron.

The two young men who were ordered to stand on guard left by one door; the two who were going to change their costumes passed out by another.

As soon as the King was alone, he went and knelt down on his *prie-Dieu*.

CHAPTER XLV.

CHICOT IS MORE KING OF FRANCE THAN EVER.

THE hour of midnight struck. It was the hour at which the gates of the Louvre were ordinarily closed. But Henri had wisely calculated that the Duc d'Anjou would not fail to sleep to-night in the Louvre. He would do so in order to weaken the suspicions the disorders of the evening must have naturally aroused in the mind of the King.

The King had, therefore, ordered the gates to be kept open until one.

At a quarter past twelve Quélus came upstairs.

"Sire," said he, "the duke has returned."

"What is Maugiron doing?"

"Watching to see whether the duke will go out again."

"There's no danger of that."

"Then" — said Quélus, with a gesture that showed the King he thought the time for action had come.

"Then — let him go to bed quietly," answered Henri.
"Who are with him?"

"M. de Monsoreau and his ordinary gentlemen."

"And M. de Bussy?"

"M. de Bussy was not with him."

"Good," said the King. It was a great relief to him to know his brother was deprived of his best sword.

"What are your Majesty's orders?" asked Quélus.

"Tell D'Épernon and Schomberg to make haste and inform Monsoreau I desire to speak with him."

Quélus bowed, and fulfilled his commission with all the promptitude wherewith hatred and the desire of vengeance can inspire the human heart.

Five minutes later, D'Épernon and Schomberg entered, the one newly garbed, the other partially scrubbed clean of the dye, except here and there in little facial cavities, by the bathing attendant, who had assured him it would take several hot vapor baths to restore him to his pristine condition.

After the two minions came M. de Monsoreau.

"The captain of your Majesty's guard has just informed me that you did me the honor to command my presence," said the grand huntsman, bowing.

"Yes, monsieur," said Henri, "yes, when I was out walking this evening there was such a fine moon and the stars were so brilliant that it struck me we were going to have splendid weather to-morrow, just the sort needed for a glorious hunt. It is only midnight, M. le Comte; you will, then, start for Vincennes at once. Have a stag roused for me, as we'll hunt to-morrow."

"But, sire," said Monsoreau, "I was under the impression that on to-morrow you had an appointment with Monseigneur d'Anjou and M. de Guise for the purpose of naming a chief of the League."

"And suppose I had, what follows, monsieur?" said the King, in that haughty tone to which it was so hard to reply.

"I was — thinking — sire," stammered the count, "that, perhaps, there would be no time" —

"There is always time, monsieur, for him who knows how to make use of it, and for that very reason I now say to you: you have time to start to-night, provided you start at once; you will have time to rouse a stag to-night and to have everything in readiness for ten to-morrow. Go, then, this very in-

stant! Quélus, Maugiron, see that the gate of the Louvre is opened for M. de Monsoreau, by my order, by order of the King; and, when he is outside, see that it is shut, also by order of the King."

The grand huntsman retired in amazement.

"Is this a whim of the King?" he asked the two young gentlemen in the antechamber.

"Yes," they answered, curtly.

M. de Monsoreau saw there was nothing to be got by further inquiry, and he was silent.

"Oho!" he murmured, with a glance in the direction of the Duc d'Anjou's apartments, "all this makes it look as if a storm were brewing for his royal highness."

But to give the prince a hint of how matters stood was impossible; Quélus stood on the right of the grand huntsman and Schomberg on his left. For a moment he believed the two minions had special orders in his regard and were holding him prisoner, and it was only when he heard the gate closing behind him that he was sure his suspicions were not well founded.

At the end of ten minutes Schomberg and Quélus were back with the King.

"Now," said the King, "perfect silence, and do you four follow me."

"Where are we going, sire?" said the ever-cautious D'Épernon.

"Those who come will learn," was the King's answer.

"Forward, then!" said the four young men together.

The minions saw to their swords, fastened their cloaks, and followed the King, who, with a lantern in his hand, led them along the secret corridor we are so well acquainted with, and through which, on more than one occasion, we have seen the queen mother and King Charles IX. make their way to the apartments of their daughter and sister Margot, the same apartments that were now, as we have stated already, tenanted by the Duc d'Anjou.

A *valet de chambre* was on duty in the corridor, but, before he had time to warn his master, Henri seized him by the hand and cautioned him to be silent. He then passed him over to his followers, who thrust him into a closet and locked the door on him.

Henri himself opened the door of the room in which the Duc d'Anjou slept.

The duke had just gone to bed, his brain full of the ambitious dreams excited by the events of the past evening. He had heard his own name cheered to the skies, while that of the King had been hooted and insulted. Under the guidance of the Duc de Guise, he had seen himself and his gentlemen received in triumph by the people of Paris, while the King's gentlemen were hissed and reviled. Never before, during the course of a long career, secret plotting, timid conspiring, and subterranean intrigue, had he made such an advance in popularity, and, consequently, in hope.

He had just laid down a letter on the table. It was a letter brought to him by M. de Monsoreau from the Duc de Guise, in which he was urged to let nothing hinder him from being present at the King's levée next morning.

The Duc d'Anjou had no need of such advice; he was only too anxious himself not to miss the hour of his triumph.

But his surprise was great when he saw the door in the secret lobby open, and his terror grew overwhelming when he perceived that it was the King who opened it.

Henri made a sign to his companions to remain on the threshold, and advanced toward the bed, grave, frowning, not uttering a word.

"Sire," stammered the duke, "the honor your Majesty does me is so unexpected" —

"That it has frightened you, eh?" said the King. "Yes, I can easily understand that. No, no, stay where you are, brother, do not rise."

"But, sire, only — permit me," answered the duke, trembling, and drawing to him the Duc de Guise's letter, which he had just been reading.

"You were reading?" inquired the King.

"Yes, sire."

"What you were reading must have been very interesting, since it kept you awake till such an advanced hour in the night?"

"Oh, sire," answered the duke, with a haggard smile, "nothing very important — the little gossip of the evening."

"Oh, of course," said Henri, "I understand all that — the little gossip of the evening, a little message from Venus; but no, I am mistaken; the little notes brought by Iris or Mercury are never sealed with such big seals as I see on that one."

The duke hid the letter entirely away.

"What a discreet creature this dear François of mine is!" exclaimed the King, with a smile so hideous that it was no wonder it terrified his brother.

However he made an effort and tried to regain a little self-confidence.

"Does your Majesty wish to say anything to me in private?" asked the duke, who had just perceived the four gentlemen on the threshold and noticed that they were enjoying the opening of the scene.

"Whatever I might have to say in private, *monsieur*," answered the King, emphasizing the last word, which was the ceremonial title given to the brothers of the King of France, — "whatever I might have to say in private shall to-day be spoken before witnesses. Do you hear, gentlemen?" he continued, turning to the four young men. "Listen attentively; the King permits you."

The duke raised his head.

"Sire," said he, with that malignant and venomous look which was the index of his serpent nature, "before insulting a man of my rank you should have refused to receive me as your guest in the Louvre; in the Hôtel d'Anjou I should, at least, have had it in my power to answer you."

"Indeed!" said Henri, with his terrible irony; "you forget, then, that wherever you are, you are my subject, and that wherever one of my subjects happens to be, he is in my house; for, thank God, I am the King! King of the entire land!"

"Sire," cried François, "I am in the Louvre, the home of my mother."

"And your mother's home is my home. Come, a truce to words; *monsieur*, give me that paper."

"What paper?"

"The one you were reading, of course! The one open on your night table which you hid when you saw me."

"Sire, reflect," said the duke.

"On what?" asked the King.

"On this: the demand you are now making, while quite worthy of one of your police officers, is utterly unworthy of a gentleman of honor."

The King grew livid.

"That letter, *monsieur*!" said he.

"A woman's letter, sire, reflect!" exclaimed François.

“There are women’s letters which it is very useful to see and very dangerous not to see; witness those written by our mother!”

“Brother!” said François.

“That letter, monsieur!” cried the King, stamping on the floor, “or I’ll have it torn from you by my Swiss!”

The duke leaped out of bed, holding the crumpled letter in his hand, evidently intending to reach the fireplace and throw it into the fire.

“You would do this to your brother?” said he.

Henri guessed his intention and at once stood between him and the chimney-piece.

“Not to my brother,” said he, “but to my deadliest enemy. Not to my brother, but to the Duc d’Anjou, who has spent the whole evening running through the streets of Paris behind the tail of M. de Guise’s horse! To my brother, who is now trying to conceal from me a letter from one of his accomplices, the Lorraine princes.”

“This time,” said the duke, “your police have made a mistake.”

“I tell you I saw the three merlets of Lorraine on the seal, those famous merlets that aspire to swallow the lilies of France. Give it up, *mordieu*! Give it up, or”—

Henri advanced a step toward the duke and laid a hand on his shoulder.

No sooner did François feel the pressure of the royal hand, no sooner did he observe, by a side glance, the menacing attitude of the four minions, who were making ready to draw their swords, than he dropped on his knees, falling back against the side of the bed, and cried:

“Help! save me! help! My brother wants to kill me.”

These words, uttered in tones of deep and heartfelt terror, impressed the King and extinguished his anger, especially because they supposed that anger greater than it really was. He believed that François really was afraid of being assassinated, of a murderous attack which would be a fratricide. Then his brain grew dizzy at the thought that in his family, a family accursed as are all the families of a race just about to expire, it had become a tradition that brother should assassinate brother.

“No,” said he, “you are wrong, brother; I will not do you any injury of the kind you fear. You have struggled; now

acknowledge that you are beaten. You know the King is your master; even if you were ignorant of it before, you know it now. Well, then! confess as much, not only to yourself, but aloud, before the world."

"I confess it, brother, I proclaim it," cried the duke.

"Very well. Now for the letter. The King orders you to give up the letter."

The Duc d'Anjou dropped the paper.

The King picked it up, and, without reading it, folded and slipped it into his pocket-book.

"Is that all, sire?" asked the duke, with his malignant look.

"No, monsieur," answered Henri, "as a punishment for this rebellion, which, luckily, has had no unpleasant consequences, you will have the goodness to keep your room until my suspicions in your regard are completely dissipated. You are here in a comfortable apartment with which you are quite familiar and which has not at all the look of a prison; you will stay here, then. You will have good company, at least outside the door, and, for to-night, these four gentlemen will guard you; to-morrow morning they will be relieved by a Swiss guard."

"But can I not see my own friends?"

"Whom do you call your friends?"

"M. de Monsoreau, of course, and M. de Ribeirac, M. Antraquet, and M. de Bussy."

"Oh, yes; the latter, of course, especially."

"Has he had the misfortune to displease your Majesty?"

"Yes," answered the King.

"When?"

"Always, and particularly to-night."

"To-night? What has he done to-night?"

"He has been the means of getting me insulted in the streets of Paris."

"You, sire?"

"Yes, me, or my faithful friends, which is the same thing."

"Bussy has been the occasion of some one being insulted in the streets of Paris to-night? You have been misinformed, sire."

"I know what I am talking about."

"Sire," cried the duke, with an air of triumph, "M. de Bussy has not left his hotel for the last two days! He is ill in bed, shivering with fever."

The King turned to Schomberg.

"If he was shivering with fever," said the young man, "then he was shivering in the Rue Coquillière, and not in his hotel."

"Who told you," asked the Duc d'Anjou, rising, "that Bussy was in the Rue Coquillière?"

"I saw him."

"You saw Bussy abroad?"

"Yes, Bussy, looking fresh, hale, and hearty, apparently the happiest man in the world; he was in the company of that follower of his, Rémy, his squire or doctor, hang me if I know which."

"Then I am entirely in the dark," said the duke, bewildered. "I saw M. de Bussy in the evening; he was in bed. He must have been deceiving me."

"No matter," said the King. "M. de Bussy will be punished like the others, and with the others, when this affair is cleared up."

The duke, who fancied a good means of diverting the anger of the King from himself would be to turn it on Bussy, said nothing further in defence of his gentleman.

"If M. de Bussy has acted thus," said he, "if, after refusing to accompany me, he went out alone, it was doubtless because he had designs which, knowing my devotion to your Majesty, he could not confess to me."

"You hear what my brother asserts, gentlemen; he asserts that he has not influenced M. de Bussy in any respect."

"So much the better," said Schomberg.

"Why so much the better?"

"Because then, perhaps, your Majesty will allow us to act as we like in the matter."

"Well, well, we'll see as to that later on," said Henri. "Gentlemen, I recommend my brother to your care. You will have him under your guard during the rest of the night; show him all the respect which is due to him as a prince of the blood, that is to say, as the first person in the realm next to myself."

"Oh, sire," answered Quélus, with a look that sent a shiver through the duke's veins, "do not be uneasy; we know all we owe to his highness."

"Tis well; adieu, gentlemen," said Henri.

"Sire," cried the duke, more alarmed at the King's depart-

ure than he had been at his arrival, "can it be that I am seriously a prisoner? Is it possible that my friends cannot visit me and that I am not allowed to go out?"

And the thought of the next morning flashed through his mind, that morning when his presence was so absolutely necessary to M. de Guise.

"Sire," said the duke, who saw that the King was wavering, "let me, at least, remain near your Majesty; my proper place is at the side of your Majesty; I am your prisoner there quite as much as elsewhere, and more immediately under your eye than elsewhere. Pray, sire, grant me the favor of staying with your Majesty."

The King saw no real danger in yielding to the Duc d'Anjou's request, and he was just on the point of saying "Yes," when his attention was distracted from his brother and drawn toward the door by the appearance of a very long and very nimble body, which, with arms, and head, and neck, and everything it could stir, was making the most violent negative gestures that any one could invent and execute without dislocating his bones.

The gesticulating body was that of Chicot.

"No," answered Henri, "you are very well here, brother, and here you must stay."

"Sire," stammered the duke.

"It seems to me it should satisfy you to learn that such is the good pleasure of the King of France, monsieur," added Henri, with an air of imperiousness that completed the duke's dismay.

"Did I not say I was the true King of France?" murmured Chicot.

CHAPTER XLVI.

HOW CHICOT PAID A VISIT TO BUSSY AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

ON the morning after the day, or rather the night, whose events we have been describing, Bussy was quietly breakfasting at nine o'clock, with Rémy, who, as his physician, had seen to it that the most nourishing eatables were on the table; they were discussing the events of the evening, and Rémy was trying to recall the legends of the frescoes in the little church of Saint Mary of Egypt.

"I say, Rémy," asked Bussy, suddenly, "do you think you recognized the gentleman they were dipping in a vat when we passed the corner of the Rue Coquillière?"

"I think I have seen him somewhere before, M. le Comte, and ever since I perceived him I have been trying to remember his name."

"But you did not recognize him fully?"

"No, monsieur; he was already quite blue."

"I ought to have rescued him," said Bussy; "gentlemen should always aid one another against clowns; but, in good truth, Rémy, I was too much taken up with my own affairs."

"Well," said Rémy, "though we did not recognize him, he certainly recognized us, who had our natural color, for his eyes rolled frightfully and he shook his clinched fist at us, evidently accompanying the gesture with a threat."

"Are you sure of that, Rémy?"

"I am sure about his eyes, but not so sure about his fist or the threat," answered Le Handouin, who knew the irascible temper of Bussy.

"Then we must find out who the gentleman is; I cannot let such an insult as that pass."

"Wait, wait a moment," cried Le Handouin, who, having made one blundering admission, apparently thought to better it by making another, "I have it! I know who he was!"

"How do you know it?"

"I heard him swear."

"I can easily believe you, *mordieu*; any one would swear in such a position."

"Yes, but he swore in German."

"Bah!"

"He said: '*Gott verdammte*.'"

"Then it was Schomberg."

"The very man, M. le Comte; the very man."

"Then, my dear Rémy, you had better prepare your salves."

"Why?"

"Because you'll have to do a little patching up on my skin or on his before long."

"You will not be so mad as to get killed, now that you are in such good health and so happy," said Rémy. "Egad! though Saint Mary of Egypt has restored you to life once, she might get tired if you asked a second miracle of her, especially as Christ himself only performed that sort of miracle twice."

"On the contrary, Rémy," answered the count, "you have no idea how much it adds to a man's happiness, when he is really happy, to stake his life against the life of another man. I assure you I have never had any real pleasure in fighting when I had lost large sums at the gaming-table, or discovered the treachery of a mistress, or was conscious of some fault on my own part. But, on the other hand, when my purse was full, my heart light, and my conscience clear, I have always gone merrily and boldly to the field. At such times I am perfectly sure of my hand, can read every thought in my opponent's eyes, and I crush him with my good fortune. I am in the position of a man playing a game of chance and who has such a run of luck all the time that he feels as if a gale of fortune was blowing all his antagonist's gold in his direction. That is the time I feel glorious, the time I am sure of myself and ready for everything and anything. I ought to be able to fight splendidly to-day, Rémy," said the young man, holding out his hand to the doctor, "for, thanks to you, I am very happy!"

"Do not be in such a hurry, if you please," said Le Haudouin; "in fact, you must really abandon the pleasure you have set before you. A beautiful lady of my acquaintance has recommended you to my care, and has made me swear to keep you safe and sound. She maintains that you owe her your life and that no one has a right to make away with what he owes."

"My good Rémy!" said Bussy, and then he fell into one of those vague reveries in which the lover sees and hears everything that is said and everything that is done, but as if behind the opaline gauze of a theatre, through which objects are perceived without their angles and the crudity of their tones: a delicious state that is almost a dream, for while pursuing the sweet and pleasing fancies that spring to life in the soul, we have our senses distracted by the words or gestures of a friend.

"You call me your 'good Rémy' because I brought you to see Madame de Monsoreau, but I wonder whether you are likely to call me so when you are separated from her, and, unfortunately, the day of parting is approaching, if it has not come already."

"What do you mean?" cried Bussy, energetically. "No jesting on that subject, Maître le Haudouin."

"Faith, monsieur, I am not jesting; are you not aware that she is on the point of starting for Anjou, and that I, too, am about to lose Mademoiselle Gertrude? Ah!"

Bussy could not help smiling at Rémy's pretended despair.

"You are very fond of her?" he asked.

"Certainly I am — and as for her — if you were to see how she beats me!"

"And you let her?"

"All on account of my love for science. She has forced me to invent a pomade which is a sovereign remedy for banishing blue marks."

"In that case you ought to send a few pots to Schomberg."

"Drop Schomberg; it was agreed between us to let him clean himself up in whatever fashion he likes himself."

"Yes, and let us return to Madame de Monsoreau, or rather, to Diane de Méridor, for you know" —

"Oh, yes, of course, I know."

"Rémy, when do we start?"

"Ah! just what I expected; as late as possible, M. le Comte."

"Why so?"

"In the first place, because we have in Paris our dear friend, M. d'Anjou, the chief of our society, and who has got into such a mess yesterday evening that he will evidently need our help."

"And in the second?"

"In the second, because M. de Monsoreau, through a special benediction you have received from Heaven, suspects nothing, at least, as far as you are concerned, and would, perhaps, suspect something if he learned of your disappearance from Paris at the same time as his wife who is not his wife."

"Oh, what need I care what he suspects?"

"Yes, but I must care, my dear monseigneur. I feel a certain satisfaction in healing the wounds you receive in your duels; you have such consummate skill that you never receive any very serious ones. But when it comes to stabs given treacherously, especially by the daggers of jealous husbands, it is quite a different affair; they usually hit hard. You remember poor M. de Saint-Mégrin, so foully done to death by our friend M. de Guise."

"But what is the use of talking, my friend? Suppose it is my fate to be killed by M. de Monsoreau?"

"Well?"

"Well! he will kill me."

"And then, in a week, or a month, or a year after, Madame de Monsoreau will marry her husband; this will be a source of terrible anger to your poor soul, which will look down at it from above, or up at it from below, but cannot in either case do anything to hinder it, for you see it will have no body."

"You are right, Rémy; I will live."

"Well and good, but to live is not everything. Believe me, you must also follow my advice and be as polite to M. de Monsoreau as you can be. He is at present frightfully jealous of the Duc d'Anjou, who, at the very time you were shivering with fever in your bed, was promenading under the lady's windows with all the air of a successful Spanish gallant. Aurilly was with him; so of course it was the duke. Do you, then, make every sort of advances to this charming husband who is not a husband; do not even have the air of wanting to know what has become of his wife; there is no reason why you should, since you know all about her already. Act in this way, and he will spread your fame abroad as that of a young gentleman possessing the virtues of Scipio: sobriety and chastity."

"I believe you are right," said Bussy. "Now that I am no longer jealous of the bear, I should like to tame him; there would be something awfully comical in the process! Well, Rémy, you can now ask me for anything you like, there is nothing I am not ready to do for you. I am happy."

At this moment some one knocked at the door. Both stopped speaking.

"Who is there?" asked Bussy.

"Monseigneur," said a page, "there is a gentleman below who wishes to speak to you."

"To speak to me so early? — who is he?"

"A tall gentleman, in green velvet, with rose-colored stockings; he has a rather funny face, but he looks like an honest man."

"Ah!" said Bussy, "I wonder would it be Schomberg."

"He said a tall gentleman."

"Yes; it would n't be Monsoreau?"

"He said 'looks like an honest man.'"

"You are right, Rémy, it can be neither; show him in."

In less than an instant the man announced stood on the threshold.

"Good heavens!" cried Bussy, rising hastily as soon as he saw his visitor, while Rémy, like a discreet friend, withdrew into a closet.

"M. Chicot!" exclaimed Bussy.

"Himself, M. le Comte," answered the Gascon.

The air of astonishment with which Bussy stared at him meant more clearly than words could have expressed it:

"Monsieur, what have you come to do here?"

And without waiting for further questions, Chicot answered, in a tone of great seriousness:

"Monsieur, I have come to propose a little bargain to you."

"Speak, monsieur," answered Bussy, in amazement.

"What would you promise me if I rendered you a great service."

"That would depend on the service," said Bussy, a little disdainfully.

The Gascon pretended not to notice the disdain.

"Monsieur," said Chicot, sitting down and crossing his legs, "I have noticed that you did not ask me to be seated."

Bussy's face flushed.

"It will be so much," said Chicot, "to be added to my recompense when I have done you the service in question."

Bussy did not answer.

"Monsieur," continued Chicot, not put out in the slightest, "are you acquainted with the League?"

"I have heard of it," answered Bussy, beginning to pay some attention to the Gascon's words.

"Well, monsieur," said Chicot, "you must know that it is an association of honest Christians united for the object of massacring their neighbors, the Huguenots, from purely religious motives. Do you belong to the League, monsieur? I know I do."

"But, monsieur"—

"Answer yes or no."

"Will you allow me to express my astonishment"—

"I did myself the honor to ask you if you belong to the League; did you understand me?"

"M. Chicot," said Bussy, "as I do not like questions the meaning of which I do not understand, I must request you to change the conversation, and I will wait a few minutes, for courtesy's sake, before repeating that I object to questioners quite as much as to questions."

"Very well, courtesy is courteous, as my dear friend M. de Monsoreau says when he is in good humor."

At the name of Monsoreau, which the Gascon uttered without apparent intention, Bussy began to listen with some show of interest.

"Aha!" he said to himself. "Does he suspect something, and has he sent this Chicot to play the spy on me?"

Then aloud:

"Come, M. Chicot," said he. "to the point! You know we have only a few minutes left."

"*Optime!*" said Chicot; "a few minutes may often be a good deal; in a few minutes a great many things may be said. I may as well tell you, however, that there is very little reason for me questioning you, since, if you do not belong to the League now, you will soon belong to it, beyond any doubt, for M. d'Anjou belongs to it."

"M. d'Anjou! who told you that?"

"Himself, addressing my own personality, as say, or rather, write, the gentlemen of the law, as used to write, for example, my worthy and dear friend M. Nicolas David, that flaming light of the *forum Parisiense* before its extinguishment without ever a one knowing who blew it out. Now, you understand clearly that if M. d'Anjou belong to the League, you cannot help belonging to it also, you who are his right arm. The League knows too well what it is about to accept a one-armed chieftain."

"Well, M. Chicot, what follows from all that?" said Bussy, more politely than he had spoken so far.

"What follows?" rejoined Chicot. "Well, this follows: if you belong to the League, or if it is even supposed you belong to it,—and, certainly, it will be supposed,—the same thing will happen to you that has happened to his royal highness."

"What has happened to his royal highness?"

"Monsieur," said Chicot, rising and imitating the attitude assumed by Bussy a moment before, "monsieur, if you will allow me to say so, I object to questioners quite as much as to questions. I am, therefore, strongly inclined to let you meet with the same fate your master has met with to-night."

"M. Chicot," said Bussy, with a smile that contained all the excuses one gentleman could be expected to make to another, "speak, I beseech you; where is the duke?"

"In prison."

“And where?”

“In his own room. Four of my good friends guard him: M. de Schomberg, who was dyed blue, as you know, for you passed him during the operation; M. d'Épernon, who turned yellow from the fright he got; M. de Quélus, who is red from anger; and M. de Maugiron, who is pale from ennui. It is a sight well worth seeing, especially as M. d'Anjou is beginning to turn green from terror, so that we privileged folk of the Louvre are about to enjoy the spectacle of a perfect rainbow.”

“So, monsieur,” said Bussy, “you believe my liberty in danger?”

“Danger, monsieur? I believe that at this very moment people are on the way to arrest you, or will be shortly.”

Bussy started.

“Do you like the Bastile, M. de Bussy? It is a capital place for those fond of meditation, and M. Laurent Testu, the governor, sets a rather good table for his captive pigeons.”

“You think they would put me in the Bastile?” cried Bussy.

“Faith, I think there must be something very like an order in my pocket to take you there, M. de Bussy. Would you like to see it?”

And Chicot thereupon drew from a pocket in his breeches — which were wide enough to accommodate thighs thrice the size of his — a royal order in due form, ordering the body of M. Louis de Clermont, Seigneur de Bussy d'Amboise, to be seized, wherever the said body might be.

“Drawn up by M. de Quélus,” said Chicot, “and it is remarkably well written, too.”

“Then, monsieur,” cried Bussy, somewhat moved by this friendly act of Chicot, “you are really rendering me a service?”

“Well, I rather think so,” said the Gascon; “do you share my opinion, monsieur?”

“Monsieur,” said Bussy, “I beg of you to treat me as an honest man. Are you saving me to-day for the purpose of exposing me to peril on some other occasion? You love the King, and the King, certainly, does not love me.”

“M. le Comte,” said Chicot, rising and bowing, “I am saving you solely for the purpose of saving you; and now you may think whatever you like of my action.”

“But to what am I to attribute such great kindness?”

"Do you forget that I am to ask you for a recompense?"

"It is true."

"Well?"

"It is granted, monsieur, with all my heart."

"Then, some day or other you will do what I ask you?"

"Upon Bussy's honor, if it be anything that can be done."

"Oh, that is quite enough for me," said Chicot, rising; "and now, monsieur, get your horse and vanish; I'll take the order for your arrest to the persons employed on such occasions."

"You were not thinking, then, of arresting me yourself?"

"Nonsense! what do you take me for? I am a gentleman, monsieur."

"But I am forsaking my master."

"You need not feel any remorse about that, for he has already forsaken you."

"You are a worthy gentleman, M. Chicot," said Bussy to the Gaseon.

"*Parbleu*, I know it," answered the latter.

Le Haudouin, who, we must render him justice, was listening at the door, entered immediately.

"Rémy!" cried Bussy; "Rémy, Rémy, our horses!"

"They are saddled, monseigneur," answered Rémy, tranquilly.

"Monsieur," said Chicot, "that young man of yours has a great deal of sense."

"Faith," said Rémy, "you never said anything truer."

And Chicot bowed to Rémy, and Rémy bowed to Chicot, in the style adopted by Guillaume Gorin and Gauthier Gargonille fifty years later.

Bussy collected a few heaps of crowns, which he stuffed into his own pockets and into those of Le Haudouin.

After this he saluted Chicot, thanked him a second time, and prepared to go downstairs.

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Chicot, "but you will allow me to be present at your departure."

And Chicot followed Bussy and Le Haudouin to the little stable-yard, where a page was waiting for them with two horses, ready saddled.

"And where are we going?" asked Rémy, carelessly taking the reins of his horse in his hand.

"Why" — answered Bussy, hesitating or seeming to hesitate.

"What do you say to Normandy, monsieur?" said Chicot, who was looking on and examining the horses with the air of a connoisseur.

"No," replied Bussy, "it is too near."

"What do you think of Flanders?" continued Chicot.

"It is too far."

"I think," said Rémy, "you might as well decide in favor of Anjou, which is at a favorable distance, is it not, M. le Comte?"

"Then let it be Anjou," said Bussy, blushing.

"Monsieur," said Chicot, "as you have made your choice and are going to start"—

"This very moment even."

"I have the honor to wish you good-by. Think of me in your prayers."

And the excellent gentleman went away gravely and majestically, his immense rapier clinking against the projections of the houses.

"It is fate, monsieur," said Rémy.

"Let us push on," cried Bussy, "and perhaps we may come up with her."

"Ah, monsieur," said Le Haudouin, "if you try to assist Fate you will take from her all her merit."

And they started.

CHAPTER XLVII.

CHICOT'S CHESS, QUÉLUS' CUP-TOSSING, AND SCHOMBERG'S PEA-SHOOTER.

WE may as well state that Chicot, in spite of his apparent coolness, returned to the Louvre in a state of exuberant joy. He had the triple satisfaction of rendering a service to a hero like Bussy, of having taken a prominent part in an intrigue, and of having rendered it possible for the King to strike the very blow which the interests of the state demanded.

In fact, what with Bussy's head, and especially with his heart, with which we are already well acquainted, and with the organizing talent of the Guises, with which we are equally well acquainted, there was great danger that a very stormy day would burst over the good city of Paris.

All that the King had feared, all that Chicot had foreseen, happened exactly as might have been anticipated.

M. de Guise, after receiving in the morning the principal Leaguers, who had come, all with their several registers covered with signatures, — those registers which, as we saw, were kept open in the principal thoroughfares, at the doors of the chief inns, and even on the altars of the churches, — M. de Guise, after promising a chief to the League and exacting an oath from every one to recognize as chief whoever should be named by the King; M. de Guise, after holding a final conference with the cardinal and M. de Mayenne, had set out to pay a visit to the Duc d'Anjou, whom he had lost sight of at ten o'clock the night before.

Chicot had expected that some such visit would be made; and so, after leaving Bussy, he strolled about the neighborhood of the Hôtel d'Alençon, situated at the corner of the Rue Hautefeuille and the Rue Saint-André.

He was hardly a quarter of an hour there when he saw the person he was waiting for coming out of the Rue de la Huchette.

Chicot hid in a corner of the Rue du Cimetière, and the Duc de Guise entered the hotel without perceiving him.

The duke met the prince's first *valet de chambre*, who was rather anxious because his master had not returned, but suspected what had really happened; namely, that he had stayed during the night in the Louvre.

The duke asked if, as the prince was absent, he might speak to Aurilly. The *valet de chambre* answered that Aurilly was in his master's cabinet and that he was at full liberty to question him.

The duke entered the cabinet.

Aurilly, it will be remembered, was the lute-player and confidant of the prince, was acquainted with all his secrets, and knew better than any one where he was likely to be found.

Aurilly was, to say the least, quite as anxious as the *valet de chambre*. After letting his fingers wander distractedly over his lute, he would, every moment, run to the window and look through the panes to see if there was any sign of his master's return.

A messenger had been sent three times to the Louvre, and had returned with the same answer every time: monseigneur had returned very late, and was now asleep.

M. de Guise questioned Aurilly about the movements of the Duc d'Anjou.

Aurilly had been separated from his master the evening before, at the corner of the Rue de l'Arbre Sec, by a crowd which increased the crush at the hostelry of La Belle-Étoile, and so had returned to wait for the duke at the Hôtel d'Alençon, not having the slightest idea that his royal highness intended to sleep in the Louvre.

The lute-player then told the Lorraine prince of the three messengers he had sent to the Louvre, and of the same identical reply that had been given to these three messengers.

"Asleep at eleven?" said the duke: "not at all probable; the King himself is up at that hour. You ought to go to the Louvre, Aurilly."

"I thought of doing so, monseigneur," answered Aurilly; "but I am afraid this sleep is but an invention he ordered the concierge to use for the benefit of troublesome visitors, and that he is on some gallant expedition in the city: in that case, his highness would be anything but pleased if we went searching for him."

"Aurilly, believe me, monseigneur has too much sense to be engaged in any such expedition on a day like this. Go to the Louvre, then, without any fear; you will be sure to find him there."

"Well, since you wish it, monseigneur, I will go; but what shall I say to him?"

"You will say to him that the meeting at the Louvre is to be at two, and that we must have a conference before coming into the King's presence. You understand, Aurilly," added the duke, with a gesture that denoted very little respect for the Duc d'Anjou, "that it is not at a time when the King is about to choose a chief for the League that his highness should be sleeping."

"Very well, monseigneur, I will beg his highness to come here."

"Where, you will tell him, I am waiting for him very impatiently. As the meeting is to be at two, many have already gone to the Louvre and there is not a moment to be lost. Meanwhile, I shall send for M. de Bussy."

"Very well, monseigneur. But in case I should not find his highness, what am I to do?"

"If you do not find his highness, Aurilly, do not make any

pretence of searching for him; it will be enough for you to tell him, later on, how eager I was to meet with him. At all events, I shall be at the Louvre at a quarter to two."

Aurilly bowed himself out.

Chicot witnessed his departure and guessed at its cause.

If the Duc de Guise should learn of the arrest of M. d'Anjou, all was lost, or, at least, the troubles that must ensue would be fraught with mischief.

Chicot saw that Aurilly went up the Rue de la Huchette, evidently intending to cross the Pont Saint-Michel; on the other hand, he himself descended the Rue Saint-André-des-Arts with all the speed of his long legs, and passed the Seine at the very moment when Aurilly had still hardly reached the Grand Châtelet.

We shall follow Aurilly, who is guiding us to the very theatre of the important events of the day.

He moved along the quays, thronged with citizens looking like men who had achieved a great triumph, and reached the Louvre, which, amid all this joyous excitement of the Parisians, retained its air of restful and austere tranquillity.

Aurilly was familiar with the men and manners of the court; he talked first with the officer at the gate, always an important personage in the eyes of news-seekers and scandal-mongers.

The officer was affable and communicative; the King had risen in the best possible humor.

Aurilly went from the officer to the concierge.

The concierge was reviewing a number of servants who had received new costumes, and was distributing among them handkerchiefs of a novel invention.

He smiled on the lute-player, answered his remark on the rain and fine weather, and, in fact, gave Aurilly the most favorable idea of the condition of the political atmosphere.

After this, Aurilly went further and ascended the grand staircase leading to the duke's apartments, saluting quite a number of courtiers on the way, who were scattered on the landings and through the antechambers.

At the door leading into his highness's apartments he found Chicot sitting on a camp-stool.

Chicot was playing at chess, all by himself, and appeared to be absorbed in some profound combination.

Aurilly tried to pass, but Chicot, with his long legs, blocked up the doorway.

He was forced to tap the Gascon's shoulder.

"Ah, it is you," said Chicot, "excuse me, M. Aurilly."

"Why, what are you doing, M. Chicot?"

"Playing at chess, as you see."

"All by yourself?"

"Yes — I am studying a problem. Do you play at chess, monsieur?"

"Very little."

"Ah, yes, I know; you are a musician, and music is so difficult an art that those gifted in that way must give it all their time and all their understanding."

"Apparently the problem you are engaged on is a rather serious one," said Aurilly, laughing.

"Yes, it is my king who troubles me: you know, monsieur, that in chess the king is a very stupid, very insignificant personage; he has no will of his own, cannot take a step to the right, cannot take a step to the left, while he is surrounded with active enemies, — knights who jump three squares at a time, a crowd of pawns always around him, always at his heels, always harassing him, so that he is a badly advised sovereign; ah, faith! it looks as if, in a little time, he must be a ruined monarch. True he has his fool,¹ who goes and comes, and trots from one end of the chess-board to the other, who has the right to throw himself in front of him, or stand behind him, or beside him, as the case may be: but, the more devoted the fool is to his king, the more risk he runs, himself, and I will not conceal from you, M. Aurilly, that, at the present moment, my king and his fool are in an unpleasant predicament."

"But," asked Aurilly, "what chance has led you, M. Chicot, to study all these combinations at the door of his royal highness?"

"Because I am waiting for M. Quélus, who is inside."

"Inside? Where?"

"Why, with his royal highness."

"M. de Quélus with his royal highness?" asked Aurilly, utterly bewildered.

During the dialogue, Chicot had left the way clear for the lute-player, so that, at length, Aurilly was between the jester and the door leading into the Duc d'Anjou's apartments.

Still, Aurilly hesitated about opening the door.

¹ In English chess, the bishop.

"Would you tell me," said he, "what M. de Quélus is doing with the Duc d'Anjou? I was not aware they were such very great friends."

"Hush!" answered Chicot, with an air of mystery.

Then, still holding his chess-board with both hands, he made a curve with his long person so that, without moving from the place where he stood, his lips reached the ears of Aurilly.

"He is asking pardon," said he, "of his royal highness for a little quarrel they had yesterday."

"Indeed?" said Aurilly.

"The King insisted on it. You know on what good terms the two brothers are at present. The King would not for a moment allow Quélus to be impertinent to his brother, and so Quélus was ordered to make the most humble apology to the Duc d'Anjou."

"Really?"

"Ah, M. Aurilly, I think that we are, of a truth, returning to the age of gold. The Louvre will soon be transformed into an Arcadia, and the two brothers will be *Arcades ambo*. Ah, forgive me, M. Aurilly, I am always forgetting that you are a musician."

Aurilly smiled and passed into the antechamber, while, at the same time, through the door he had opened, Chicot exchanged a significant glance with Quélus, who had probably been warned of the state of affairs beforehand.

Chicot then resumed his combinations, scolding his King in good, set terms, not more harshly than, perhaps, a king in flesh and bone would have deserved, but far too harshly for a poor little king made of ivory.

As soon as Aurilly entered the antechamber he was courteously saluted by Quélus, who held between his hands a superb cup and ball of ebony inlaid with ivory, and was making rapid evolutions with them.

"Bravo, M. de Quélus!" said Aurilly, on seeing the young man perform quite a difficult feat with them. "bravo!"

"Ah, my dear M. Aurilly," said Quélus, "shall I ever be able to toss cup and ball as skilfully as you finger the lute?"

"When you have spent as many years studying your toy," answered Aurilly, somewhat offended, "as I have spent in studying my instrument. But, by the way, where is monseigneur?" Did you not speak to him this morning, monsieur?"

"I had an audience with him, my dear Aurilly, but Schomberg has tripped me up and is the favorite at present."

"What! M. de Schomberg also?" exclaimed the lute-player, more astonished than ever.

"Why, yes, of course. The King manages all that. He is yonder in the dining-room. Enter, then, M. d'Aurilly, and remind the prince that we are waiting for him."

Aurilly opened the second door and saw Schomberg sitting, or rather, reclining, on a long sofa stuffed with feathers. He was amusing himself in this position by firing little pellets of perfumed clay — of which he had ample supply in his game-bag — from a pea-shooter, and sending them through a gold ring suspended by a silken thread from the ceiling; a pet dog brought back to him all of them that were not broken against the wall.

"What!" cried Aurilly, "practising at such an exercise in the apartments of his highness! Oh, M. de Schomberg!"

"Ah! *guten morgen*, M. Aurilly," said Schomberg, interrupting for a moment his amusement; "you see I am trying to kill time while waiting for my audience."

"But where is monseigneur?" asked Aurilly.

"Hush! monseigneur is now granting a pardon to Mangiron and D'Épernon. But do you not wish to enter, you who are on such familiar terms with the prince?"

"Perhaps it might be indiscreet?" inquired the musician.

"Not at all; quite the contrary. You will find him in his art gallery. Enter, M. Aurilly, enter."

And he pushed Aurilly by the shoulders into the next apartment, where the dazed musician perceived D'Épernon stiffening his mustache with gum, before a mirror, while Mangiron, seated near a window, was cutting out of a book engravings beside which the bas-reliefs of the temple of Venus Aphrodite at Gnidos and the pictures of Tiberius at Capri would have seemed chaste.

The duke, without his sword, was seated in his armchair between these two men, who never looked at him except to watch his movements, and never spoke to him except to utter unpleasant words.

As soon as he saw Aurilly he was about to rush forward to meet him.

"Softly, monseigneur," said Mangiron, "you are treading on my pictures."

"Great heavens! what do I behold?" cried the musician; "they are insulting my master!"

"How is that dear friend of ours M. Aurilly?" said D'Épernon, all the while pointing and twisting his mustache. "He must be in pretty good condition, for he looks very red."

"Do me the favor, Mister Musician, to bring me your little dagger, if you please," said Maugiron.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," said Aurilly, "do you not remember where you are?"

"Oh, yes, yes, indeed! my dear Orpheus," said D'Épernon, "and that is why my friend asks you for your poniard. You see clearly that M. le Duc has none."

"Aurilly," said the duke, in a voice choked by grief and rage, "do you not see I am a prisoner?"

"Prisoner of whom?"

"Of my brother. Surely you must have understood that when you saw the sort of persons who are my jailers?"

Aurilly uttered a cry of amazement.

"Oh, if I had suspected this!" said he.

"You would have brought your lute to amuse his highness, my dear M. Aurilly," said a mocking voice; "but I thought of that, and sent for it; here it is."

And Chicot handed the poor musician his lute. Behind Chicot were Quélus and Schomberg, yawning as if they must dislocate their jaws.

"And how is your chess getting along, Chicot?" asked D'Épernon.

"Oh, yes, how are you managing your game?" said Quélus.

"Gentlemen, I think my fool will save his King; but, *morbleu!* it will not be without some trouble. Come, M. Aurilly, give me your poniard in exchange for your lute — a fair exchange."

The frightened musician obeyed, and went and sat on a cushion at the feet of his master.

"We have caught one of them in the rat-trap already," said Quélus; "now for the others."

And with these words, which gave Aurilly some idea of how matters really stood, Quélus returned to his post in the ante-chamber, after asking Schomberg to exchange his pea-shooter for his cup and ball.

"It is perfectly proper," said Chicot, "to vary our amuse-

ments; and so, to diversify mine a little, I will go and sign the League."

And he closed the door, leaving the poor lute-player to bring what comfort he might to his royal highness by his presence.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

HOW THE KING NAMED A CHIEF FOR THE LEAGUE WHO WAS NEITHER GUISE NOR ANJOU.

THE hour of the great reception had arrived, or rather, was close at hand, for, ever since noon, the principal chiefs of the League, those who sympathized with them, and many who were simply actuated by curiosity, were making their way to the Louvre.

Paris, as turbulently inclined as on the previous night, but somewhat restrained by the presence everywhere of the Swiss, who had not taken part in the festival of the evening before, had sent to the royal residence its deputations of Leaguers, of workingmen's guilds, its municipal councillors, its citizen soldiers, and its constantly increasing masses of spectators, those spectators who, on days when the real people is devoting all its energies to the achievement of some object, suddenly spring into existence apparently for no other purpose than to surround that people and watch its action. They are so numerous, active, and eager that there would seem to be two peoples in Paris, every person, as it were, separating himself into two individualities, one of whom was engaged in acting, the other in looking on while the first acted.

Crowds of the populace surged around the Louvre; but no one trembled at the thought that its tenants were in any peril.

The day had not yet arrived when the murmurs of a people were to change to a thunder roar, when the fiery breath of its cannon was to overturn the walls of castles and bring them tumbling down on the heads of their masters; the Swiss of that day, ancestors though they were of the Swiss of the tenth of August and of the twenty-seventh of July, smiled on the armed masses of the Parisians, and the Parisians smiled back on the Swiss. The time had not yet come for the people to stain with blood the vestibules of kings.

It must not be imagined, however, that the drama lacked interest because it was devoid of the gruesome features to which we have alluded; on the contrary, the scenes of which the Louvre was on that day the theatre were among the most curious we have ever described.

The King, in the grand hall, or throne-room, was surrounded by his officers, friends, servants, and family, waiting until all the corporations should defile before him, and then, leaving their leaders behind them in the palace, should march to the positions assigned them under the windows and in the court-yards of the Louvre.

He was thus enabled, with a single glance, to embrace the entire mass of his enemies and almost to count them, especially as he was aided by hints from Chicot, who was concealed behind the royal seat, or by a warning flash in the eyes of the queen mother; sometimes the murmurs of the lowest classes of the Leaguers — more impatient than their leaders because ignorant of the secrets of their policy — told him what he had to expect. Suddenly M. de Monsoreau entered.

“I say, Harry,” said Chicot, “are you looking?”

“What do you want me to look at?”

“Your grand huntsman, egad! he’s well worth the trouble of being looked at. Don’t you notice how pale and dirty he is? Isn’t that enough to keep your eyes open?”

“Yes,” said the King, “I see it is the grand huntsman.”

Henri made a sign to M. de Monsoreau, who approached.

“How is it you happen to be in the Louvre, monsieur?” asked the King. “I understood you were at Vincennes, engaged in rousing a stag for our benefit.”

“Sire, the stag was roused at seven in the morning; but when it struck twelve and I had no news, I began to fear some misfortune had befallen your Majesty, and I hurried back.”

“Really?” asked the King.

“Sire,” said the count, “if I have failed in my duty, I beg you to attribute my fault to an excess of devotion.”

“I do so, monsieur,” answered Henri. “You may rest assured I appreciate it.”

“Now,” continued the count, hesitatingly, “if your Majesty requires me to return to Vincennes, as I am no longer under any apprehension” —

“No, no; remain, M. le Grand Veneur. That hunting-party was only a sudden fancy that entered our brain; it vanished

as rapidly as it came. Remain, and do not stay far from me : I feel the necessity of having devoted friends within call, and you have just ranked yourself among those upon whose devotion I can rely."

Monsoreau bowed.

"Where does your Majesty wish me to stay?" asked the count.

"Will your Majesty give him to me for half an hour?" whispered Chicot in the King's ear.

"For what purpose?"

"To torment him a little. You owe me some compensation after forcing me to be present at such a stupid ceremony as this one you promise us is sure to be."

"All right, take him."

"I have had the honor of asking your Majesty where it is your wish I should take my stand?" inquired the count a second time.

"I thought I had answered: Wherever you like. Behind my chair, if you have no objection. It is where I station my friends."

"Come here, my worthy grand huntsman," said Chicot, making room for him, "scent me out some of those rascals yonder. That's a sort of game you can track without help of bloodhound. *Ventre de biche*, M. le Comte, what a stench! It comes from the shoemakers who are passing, or rather have passed; and next we have the tanners. *Mort de ma vie!* I tell you, grand huntsman mine, if you lose the scent of these fellows, I'll take your office from you!"

M. de Monsoreau made a pretence of listening, or rather he listened without hearing.

His mind was preoccupied by some weighty affair and he looked around him with an air of absent-mindedness which did not escape the notice of the King, especially as Chicot took good care to call his attention to it.

"Ah," said the Gascon, in an undertone to the King, "do you know what your grand huntsman is hunting at the present moment?"

"No; what is he hunting?"

"He is hunting your brother of Anjou."

"The game is not in sight, at all events," answered Henri, laughing.

"No. Do you believe he knows where it is?"

"I confess I should not be sorry if he were on the wrong scent."

"Stay a moment," said Chicot, "and I'll have him following the wrong scent in no time. We are told the wolf smells like the fox; it is easy enough to send him on a fool's errand. You just ask him where is his countess?"

"Why should I do so?"

"Ask and you'll see."

"M. le Comte," said the King, "pray what have you done with Madame de Monsoreau? I do not see her among the ladies of the court."

The count started as if a serpent had stung him in the foot.

Chicot scratched the end of his nose, at the same time winking at the King.

"Sire," answered the grand huntsman, "Madame la Comtesse has been ill; the air of Paris did not agree with her. She therefore left the city last night, after receiving the Queen's permission, in company with her father, the Baron de Méridor."

"And to what part of France is she travelling?" inquired the King, delighted to have an excuse for turning away his head while the tanners were passing.

"To Anjou, her native country, sire."

"The fact is," said Chicot gravely, "that the air of Paris is not good for women in her condition: *Gravidis uxoribus Lutetia inclemens*. I advise you, Henri, to imitate the example of the count and send the Queen away from here when she is in the same interesting situation" —

Monsoreau turned pale and looked furiously at Chicot, who, his elbow resting on the royal chair and his chin resting on his hand, appeared to be entirely taken up with the lace-makers, who came after the tanners.

"And who told you, you impudent fellow, that Madame la Comtesse was with child?" murmured Monsoreau.

"Is she not?" said Chicot. "I should imagine you would consider such a supposition far more impertinent than any other could be."

"Well, she is not, monsieur."

"I say, Henri, did you hear?" asked Chicot of the King. "It would seem this grand huntsman of yours has committed exactly the same fault you committed yourself. He has forgotten to bring the chemises of Our Lady together."

Monsoreau clenched his hand and swallowed his anger in silence, hurling a look of hatred at Chicot, who answered it by slouching his hat over his eyes and giving an air of defiance to the long, slender plume that drooped over his forehead.

The count saw that the moment would be badly chosen for quarrelling with the jester; he shook his head, as if he would thus dispel the clouds this dialogue had brought to his brow.

Chicot also brightened up in his turn, and, the swaggering air he had assumed for a moment giving way to a most gracious smile, he added:

"I am afraid that poor countess will never survive the journey. She will be bored to death."

"I told the King," said Monsoreau, "she was travelling with her father."

"Oh, I allow that a father is a very respectable person to travel with, but he is not always very amusing. If the poor lady had none but this excellent baron to entertain her on the road — Luckily, however, she" —

"What?" asked the count, sharply.

"What 'what' are you talking about?" answered Chicot.

"What do you mean to imply by 'luckily'?"

"Ah, you made an ellipsis, M. le Comte, when you spoke last."

The count shrugged his shoulders.

"I assure you I am right, grand huntsman mine; the interrogative form you just used is called an ellipsis. If you don't believe me, ask Henri; he's a philologist."

"Yes," answered Henri, "but what does your adverb mean?"

"What adverb?"

"*Luckily*."

"*Luckily* meant *luckily*. *Luckily* was the word I used, in this admiring the goodness of God, for *luckily*, at the very moment I am speaking, there are some of our friends rambling along the highways, and friends of the very wittiest description, too, who, when they meet the countess, will be quite sure to amuse and entertain her; that is a dead certainty. And," added Chicot, negligently, "as they follow the same road, I should say it is rather probable that they must meet. Oh, I can see them from here. Do you see them, Henri? You ought, you are a man with a fine imagination. Dost see them prancing and caracoling along some beautiful green lane or

other, all the time saying sweet things to Madame la Comtesse, who is perfectly enchanted with them, the dear lady?"

A second dagger this, and even sharper than the first, planted in the breast of the grand huntsman.

However, he had to bear it; he could not show his anger in the King's presence, and Chicot had, for the time at least, an ally in the King. So Monsoreau, putting a terrible curb on his ill-humor, addressed the jester in tones he did his very best to render amiable.

"So M. Chicot," said he, "you have friends on their way to Anjou?"

"You might say with even more truth that *we* have, M. le Comte; for those friends are a good deal more your friends than they are mine."

"You astonish me, M. Chicot," said the count. "I know of no one who is" —

"Oh, very well; pretend to make a mystery of the matter."

"I give you my word I don't know of any."

"On the contrary, you have so many of such friends and friends so dear to you that, although you knew perfectly well they were on the road to Anjou, from mere force of habit, your eyes were wandering an instant ago over the crowd in search of them; of course a moment's reflection told you they were not here."

"You say you have seen me doing this?"

"Yes, you, the grand huntsman, and the palest grand huntsman that has ever existed, from Nimrod to M. d'Autefort, your predecessor."

"M. Chicot!"

"The palest, I repeat, — *veritas veritatum*. Although that is a barbarism, for one truth cannot be truer than another; if one truth were truer than another, then that other would be false — but you are not a philologist, dear M. Esau."

"No, monsieur, I am not; and so I must request you to come back directly to those friends of mine of whom you spoke, and to have the goodness, if your superabundant imagination will let you, to give those friends their real names."

"Ah, you are always repeating the same thing. Search, M. le Grand Veneur, search. *Morbleu!* it is your trade to rouse beasts; witness that unfortunate stag you started this morning, which never expected such an ill turn on your part. How

should you like if you were prevented from taking a nap in the morning yourself ? ”

The eyes of Monsoreau again wandered anxiously over those immediately around the King.

“ What ? ” he cried, on noticing a place vacant by the King’s side.

“ What ails you ? ” said Chicot.

“ Where is M. le Duc d’Anjou ? ” exclaimed the grand huntsman.

“ Tally-ho ! Tally-ho ! ” said the Gascon, “ so the beast is started at last ! ”

“ He must have left to-day ! ” cried the count.

“ He *must* have left to-day,” answered Chicot, “ and he may have left yesterday evening. You are not a philologist, monsieur : but you can question the King, who is one. I say, Harry, when did your brother disappear ? ”

“ Last night,” replied the King.

“ The duke has left, the duke has left,” murmured Monsoreau, wan and trembling. “ Ah ! great God ! great God ! What is this you tell me, sire ? ”

“ I do not say,” rejoined the King, “ that my brother has left : all I say is that he disappeared last night, and even his best friends do not know what has become of him.”

“ Oh ! ” exclaimed the count, wild with rage, “ if I believed that ”

“ And supposing you did, what could you do ? ” said Chicot. “ And where would be the great harm, even if he did pay a few tender compliments to Madame de Monsoreau. Our gentle friend François is the gallant of the family ; he was so during King Charles IX.’s reign, as long as that monarch reigned, and he is so now during the reign of Henri III., a prince who is kept far too busy to have time for gallantry himself. Hang it, man ! don’t you know that there should be at least one prince at court capable of representing the French spirit ? ”

“ The duke, the duke left ! ” repeated Monsoreau, “ are you quite sure of this, monsieur ? ”

“ Are you ? ” asked Chicot.

“ The count again turned his eyes to the place ordinarily occupied by the prince, next his brother, but which continued vacant.

“ I am ruined,” he murmured, making a movement so indicative of his intention to flee that Chicot detained him.

"Will you keep quiet, man, *mordieu*? You do nothing but jump and fidget, and that harms the King, whose heart is weak. *Mort de ma vie!* should n't I like to be in your wife's place, even if for nothing else than the pleasure of seeing every day a prince with a double nose, and of hearing M. Aurilly, who plays the lute as well as the late lamented Orpheus! What luck your wife has! What luck, by Jupiter!"

Monsoreau actually shivered with fury.

"Take it quietly, though, M. le Comte," continued Chicot; "try to conceal your delight; you see the session is just opening. It is highly unbecoming for any one to reveal his feelings as you are doing; pray, attend to the discourse of the King."

There was nothing left the grand huntsman but to remain where he was standing, for, in fact, the grand hall of the Louvre was now gradually filling, and soon became thronged. He, therefore, kept quiet during the rest of the ceremony, to which he had the appearance of paying close attention.

When the whole assembly had taken their seats, M. de Guise entered and knelt on one knee before the King, not without also casting a glance of surprise and uneasiness at the empty seat of the Duc d'Anjou.

The King rose. The heralds commanded silence.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HOW THE KING NAMED A CHIEF WHO WAS NEITHER THE DUC DE GUISE NOR THE DUC D'ANJOU.

"GENTLEMEN," said the King, amid the profoundest silence and after seeing that D'Épernon, Maugiron, Schomberg, and Quéhus, replaced in their guardianship of the Duc d'Anjou by ten Swiss, had entered and taken a position behind him. "gentlemen, a king, placed as he is, so to speak, between earth and heaven, hears equally the voices that come from above and the voices that come from below, namely, what God commands and what his people command. I understand perfectly that the association of all classes in one body for the defence of the Catholic faith is a powerful guarantee of protection for my subjects. Consequently I have received, with much pleasure, the advice given me by my cousin of Guise. I de-

clare, therefore, the holy League well and duly sanctioned and instituted: and, as so great a body should have a worthy and powerful head, and as the chief whose function it will be to uphold the Church should be one of the most zealous sons of that Church, one whose zeal is naturally quickened by the very nature of the office he holds, I select a Christian prince for the leadership of this League, and I declare that henceforth this chief shall be" —

Henri paused designedly.

The buzzing of a fly could have been distinctly heard, so deep was the general silence.

Henri repeated:

"And I declare that this chief shall be Henri de Valois, King of France and Poland."

Henri, in uttering these words, had raised his voice in a somewhat affected manner, partly to mark his triumph, partly to inflame the enthusiasm of his friends, who were wild with delight, and partly to complete the dismay of the Leaguers, whose sullen murmurs revealed their discontent, surprise, and terror.

As for the Duc de Guise, he was simply panic-struck; large drops of perspiration stood on his forehead. He exchanged looks with the Duc de Mayenne and his brother, the cardinal, who were each standing in the midst of a group of leaders, the one on his right, the other on his left.

Monsoreau, more astonished than ever at the absence of the Duc d'Anjou, began, notwithstanding, to feel somewhat reassured in recalling the words of Henri III.

In fact, the prince might have disappeared and yet not have started for Anjou.

The cardinal, without showing alarm or surprise, left the Leaguers among whom he was standing and stole up to his brother.

"François," he whispered in his ear, "unless I am very much mistaken, we are no longer safe here. Let us hasten to take our leave, for the populace is very uncertain, and the King, whom they execrated yesterday, will be their idol for some days."

"Yes," answered Mayenne, "let us start. Do you wait here for our brother; I am going to take measures for our safe departure."

"Go, then."

During this time the King had been the first to sign the document prepared beforehand and laid on the table by M. de Morvilliers, the only person in the secret except the queen mother. Then, in that jeering tone which he adopted occasionally with so much success, he said to M. de Guise, exaggerating his ordinary nasal twang :

"Sign, pray, fair cousin."

And he passed him his pen.

Then, pointing out the place with the tip of his finger :

"There, there," said he, "beneath me always. Now hand the pen to M. le Cardinal and M. de Mayenne."

But the Duc de Mayenne was already outside the door, and the cardinal was in another apartment.

The King remarked on their absence.

"Then pass it to our grand huntsman," said he.

The duke signed, handed the pen to the grand huntsman, and was about to retire.

"Wait," said the King.

And while Quélus was taking the pen from M. de Monseigneur, with his most contemptuous air, and while not only the noblemen present, but all the chief men of the guilds, brought hither for this great event, were making haste to sign their names below that of the King, on register lists which were to form the continuation of the register lists signed the evening before by noble and clown, great and small, on terms of perfect equality, the King was saying to the Duc de Guise :

"Fair cousin, it was, if I mistake not, your opinion that our capital should be guarded by a good army composed of all the forces of the League? The army is now formed and completed in the most proper fashion, for the natural general of the Parisians is, of course, the King."

"Assuredly, sire," answered the duke, who did not very well know what he was saying.

"But I do not forget I have another army to command, and the generalship of this army belongs of right to the first warrior of my realm. While I take the command of the League, you will go, then, and take the command of the army, cousin."

"And when am I to start?" inquired the duke.

"Immediately," replied the King.

"Henri, Henri!" muttered Chicot, who had a strong desire to interrupt the King, but knew his doing so would be too great a breach of etiquette to be allowed, even in his case.

But as the King either had not heard him, or, if he had, had not understood him, the Gascon advanced with an air of great reverence, holding an enormous pen in his hand and elbowing every one aside, until he was close to the King.

"Will you hold your tongue, you double-dyed booby?" said he in a whisper; "at least, if you have an atom of sense left, you will."

But Chicot was too late.

The King, as we have seen, had already announced to the duke his nomination and was now handing him his commission, signed some time before, in spite of all the gestures and grimaces of the jester.

The Duc de Guise took the commission and retired.

The cardinal was waiting for him outside the hall, and the Duc de Mayenne was waiting for both at the gate of the Louvre.

They mounted their horses that instant, and before very many minutes had passed, all three were outside Paris.

The rest of the assembly withdrew gradually, some crying, "Long live the King!" and others, "Long live the League!"

"At least," said Henri, laughing, "I have solved a great problem."

"Oh, yes," murmured Chicot, "you are a grand mathematician, you are!"

"I think I am, really," returned the King. "You see I have forced all these rascals, whose watchwords were two entirely antagonistic cries, to have but one cry, to shout the same thing."

"*Sta bene!*" said the queen mother, grasping her son's hand.

"If you pin your faith on that, you are nicely sold," said the Gascon to himself. "The woman is simply driven crazy with joy: she thinks she has got rid of her Guises forever."

"Oh, sire," cried the favorites, noisily approaching the King, "what a sublime idea you have had!"

"They believe now that gold is going to rain on them like manna," whispered Chicot into the other ear of the King.

Henri was led in triumph back to his private apartments. In the midst of the procession that attended and followed the King, Chicot played the part of the slave in ancient times who accompanied the triumphant general in his chariot, ridiculing and reviling him.

The obstinacy of Chicot in reminding the demi-god of the day that he was but a man had, at last, such an effect on the King that he dismissed everybody but the Gascon.

"Well, now," said Henri, turning toward him, "do you know it is impossible to content you, Maître Chicot? And do you know, too, that this gets to be a bore, in the long run? Confound it, man, I do not ask you to speak to me with ordinary politeness, but I do ask you, when you speak to me, to talk common sense."

"You are right, Henri," answered Chicot, "for that is the thing of which you stand most in need."

"You will agree, at least, that the game was cleverly played?"

"The very thing to which I have n't the slightest intention of agreeing."

"Ah, King of France, your Majesty is jealous!"

"Jealous! God forbid! Whenever I am jealous, I'll select some one more worthy of exciting that feeling than you."

"*Corbleu*, Master Fault-finder, you are coming out rather strong!"

"Your self-love and vanity make one sick, Henri."

"Come, now, will you deny that I am King of the League?"

"Most undoubtedly — I do not — Have I denied it? But" —

"But what?"

"You are no longer King of France."

"And who, pray, is King of France?"

"Every one except you, Henri; first, your brother."

"My brother! Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of M. d'Anjou, and no one else, by my faith!"

"Who is my prisoner?"

"Yes, for prisoner though he be, he has been crowned, and you have not been."

"By whom was he crowned?"

"By the Cardinal de Guise. In good sooth, Henri, you do well to praise up your police; a king is crowned in Paris, in presence of thirty-three persons, in the church of Sainte Geneviève even, and you never heard a word about it."

"While you, of course, — Heaven save the mark! — know all about it!"

"Certainly, I know all about it."

"And how can you know what I do not know?"

"Oh, because you do your police work through M. de Morvilliers, while I do mine on my own hook."

The King frowned.

"We have, then, without counting Henri de Valois, a King of France called François d'Anjou, and we have also — let me see" — said Chicot, with the air of a man cudgelling his brains: "oh, yes, we have also the Duc de Guise."

"The Duc de Guise?"

"The Duc de Guise, Henri de Guise, Henri the Balafgré. I repeat, then: we have also the Duc de Guise."

"A fine king, really! a king I exile, send to the army."

"Good! as if you had not been exiled to Poland; as if La Charité were not nearer to the Louvre than Cracow was to Paris! Oh, yes, you are right, you send him to the army; no one but you could plan such a deep-laid scheme; sharp as a needle you are, Henri; you send him to the army! That means you place thirty thousand men at his beck and call. *Ventre de biche!* and what an army! a true army, that — not like your army of the League — no, indeed! An army of grocers and haberdashers is good enough for Henri de Valois, King of the minions. Henri de Guise must have an army of soldiers, and what soldiers! — men inured to battle, scorched by cannon, men who would make a mouthful of twenty of your armies of the League; so that if Henri de Guise, no longer satisfied with being king *de facto*, should take the idiotic fancy into his head to become king in name also, he would only have to turn his trumpets in the direction of the capital and say: 'Forward! let us make a clean sweep of Paris and of Henri de Valois and of the Louvre along with him.' They would do it, the wretches; I know what stuff they're made of."

"You forget only one thing in your argument, illustrious statesman," retorted the King.

"Oh, that's quite possible: perhaps I am forgetting a fourth king."

"No, you forget," said Henri, with supreme scorn, "that the aspirant to the sovereignty of France, especially when the reigning sovereign is a Valois, must go back a little and count his ancestors. That such an idea should come into the head of M. d'Anjou is not improbable; he belongs to a race any member of which might have such an ambition; his ancestors are mine; the only question that could create a struggle between us is the question of primogeniture. It is primogeni-

ture alone that gives me a right superior to his. But M. de Guise — Nonsense, friend Chicot, you had better go and study heraldry, and then you will be able to say which is the escutcheon of the nobler house, the lilies of France or the merlets of Lorraine."

"Aha! that is just where you make your mistake, Henri," answered Chicot.

"My mistake? Where is my mistake?"

"Undoubtedly, your mistake. M. de Guise is of a far better house than you have any notion of, and you may take my word for it, too."

"Of a better house than mine, perhaps," said Henri, with a smile.

"There is no mistake about it, my little Harry."

"You are a fool, M. Chicot."

"Oh, yes, I believe such is my title at your court."

"But I mean a fool in its true and proper sense, a shallow-pated fool. You ought to go and learn to read, my friend."

"Well, Henri," answered Chicot, "you know how to read and don't require to go back to school, as you say I do. Please read this."

And Chicot drew from his breast the parchment upon which Nicolas David had written the genealogy with which we are acquainted, the genealogy brought back from Avignon with the approval of the Pope, and in which it was shown that Henri de Guise was descended from Charlemagne.

Henri turned pale as soon as he had cast his eyes over the document and recognized, near the legate's signature, the seal of Saint Peter.

"What do you say to that, Henri?" asked Chicot; "are not your lilies thrown a little into the background? *Ventre de biche!* as far as I can see, the merlets want to fly as high as the eagle of Cæsar; beware of them, my son!"

"But how did you manage to get possession of this genealogy?"

"I? Do I bother about such things? It came in search of me by itself."

"But where was it before it found you?"

"Under a lawyer's bolster."

"And that lawyer's name?"

"Maître Nicolas David."

"Where was he?"

"In Lyons."

"And who went to Lyons to take it from under this lawyer's bolster?"

"A good-natured friend of mine."

"What does this friend of yours do?"

"He preaches."

"Then he's a monk."

"Undoubtedly."

"And his name?"

"Gorenflot."

"What!" cried Henri, "that abominable Leaguer who delivered such an incendiary harangue in the convent of Sainte Geneviève, and insulted me yesterday in the streets of Paris?"

"Do you remember the story of Brutus, who pretended to be mad"—

"Why, then, your Genevievean monk must be a deep politician?"

"Have you not heard of Signor Machiavelli, secretary of the Florentine Republic? Your grandmother used to be his pupil."

"Then he purloined that document from the lawyer?"

"You can hardly say 'purloined'; he took it from him by force."

"Took it by force from Nicolas David, who is known to be a desperado?"

"Yes, from Nicolas David, who was known to be a desperado."

"Why, he is a brave man, then, this monk of yours?"

"As brave as Bayard!"

"And, after the performance of this fine deed, he has never come near me to ask for his reward?"

"He returned humbly to his convent, only asking for one thing, that it should be forgotten he had ever left it."

"Then he is modest also?"

"As modest as Saint Crispin."

"Chicot, on my honor as a gentleman your friend shall have the first abbey vacant," said the King.

"I thank you in his name, Henri."

Then the Gascon said to himself:

"By my faith, I can see him now between Mayenne and Valois, between a rope and a prebend. Is he likely to be

hanged, or is he likely to have the abbey? He would be a wise man who could tell.

"In any case, if he is still asleep he must have the queerest of dreams."

CHAPTER L.

ETEOCLES AND POLYNICES.

THE close of this day was as tumultuous and brilliant for the League as had been its beginning.

The friends of the King were in raptures. The preachers of the League were preparing to canonize Brother Henri and were recounting everywhere the great warlike deeds of Valois, who had shown such heroism in his youth.

The favorites said: "The lion is roused at last."

The Leaguers said: "The fox has got a glimpse of the trap laid for him at last."

And, as the principal characteristic of the French people is vanity, and, as the French do not care much for leaders of inferior intelligence, the conspirators themselves were rather proud of their King for tricking them so cleverly.

The chiefs of the association had, however, sought safety in flight.

The three Lorraine princes, as we have seen, had clapped spurs to their horses and were soon out of Paris. Their principal agent, M. de Monsoreau, was about leaving the Louvre to make his preparations for departure, with the object of coming up with the Duc d'Anjou.

But no sooner was his foot on the threshold than Chicot accosted him.

The palace was now free from Leaguers, and the Gascon was no longer alarmed about his King.

"Where are you going in such a hurry, M. le Grand Veneur?" he inquired.

"To overtake his highness," the count answered, curtly.

"To overtake his highness?"

"Yes, I am uneasy about him. The present time is not such that a prince can travel safely without a considerable escort."

"Oh, yes," said the Gascon, "and our prince is so brave that he is inclined even to be rash."

The grand huntsman stared at Chicot.

"At any rate," said the latter, "I am even more uneasy than you are."

"About whom?"

"Of course, about the same royal highness."

"Why?"

"You have not heard the rumor?"

"Does not the rumor run that he has left Paris?" asked the count.

"There is a report that he is dead," whispered the Gascon in the grand huntsman's ear.

"Pshaw!" answered Monsoreau, in a tone in which there was joy as well as surprise. "did you not tell me he was on the road to Anjou?"

"Upon my soul, I was persuaded that such was the case. You see I am so sincere myself that I take for granted every story buzzed into my ears. But since then I have had good grounds for believing that, if the poor prince is on any road, he is on the road to the other world."

"Come, now, who has put this gloomy idea into your head?"

"He entered the Louvre yesterday, did he not?"

"Undoubtedly; I entered with him."

"Well, no one has seen him leave it."

"Leave the Louvre?"

"Yes."

"But Aurilly?"

"Vanished also!"

"And his gentlemen?"

"Vanished! vanished! all vanished!"

"You are having a joke at my expense, are you not, M. Chicot?" said the grand huntsman.

"Go and ask."

"Whom?"

"The King."

"But I cannot question his Majesty, can I?"

"Pshaw! there is a way of going about everything."

"At all events," said the count, "I cannot remain in such uncertainty."

And, leaving Chicot, or rather, walking in front of him, he made his way to the royal cabinet.

He was told the King had just gone out.

"Where has his Majesty gone?" inquired the grand hunts-

man. "It is my duty to give him an account of the execution of certain orders with which he honored me."

"He has gone to see the Duc d'Anjou," answered the person he addressed.

"To see the Duc d'Anjou!" said the count to Chicot; "then the prince is not dead?"

"Alas!" returned the Gascon, "if not dead, I'm afraid he is as good as dead."

This answer completed the bewilderment of the grand huntsman. He was now almost sure the Duc d'Anjou had not quitted the Louvre.

Certain reports he had heard, as well as the manner of certain officials he met, confirmed him in this opinion.

As he was ignorant of the real cause of the prince's absence at the late critical juncture, this absence astonished him beyond measure.

It was true, as he had been told, that the King had gone to see the Duc d'Anjou, but as the grand huntsman, in spite of his anxiety to learn what was passing in the prince's apartments, could not, in the circumstances, very well enter them, he was forced to wait in the corridor for whatever news might reach him.

We have stated that, in order to allow the four minions to be present at the session, their places had been taken by Swiss guardsmen; but, as soon as it was over, their desire to be disagreeable to the prince got the better of the ennui they experienced from being compelled to mount guard over him, especially as they wanted to have an opportunity of informing him of the King's triumph. Consequently, they resumed their posts, Schomberg and D'Épernon in the drawing-room, Maugiron and Quélus in his highness's bedchamber.

François, on the other hand, was terribly depressed, both by his confinement and by his anxiety as to how it would end, and it must certainly be said that the conversation of these young gentlemen was not of a character to raise his spirits.

"Really," said Quélus to Maugiron, speaking across the room just as if the prince were not there at all, "really, Maugiron, it is only during the last hour that I have begun to appreciate our friend Valois; upon my word, I believe him to be a great statesman."

"Explain your meaning," answered Maugiron, throwing himself on a sofa.

"The King spoke openly of the conspiracy. Now, as long as he was afraid of it, he dissembled, kept quiet about it. The fact that he has discussed it so frankly proves he is no longer afraid of it."

"What you say is logical," answered Maugiron.

"If he is no longer afraid of it, he will punish it; you know our Valois: he has many resplendent qualities, but certainly that of clemency does not shine among them."

"You never spoke truer."

"Now, if he punish the said conspiracy, we shall have a trial, and this trial will be a second representation of the Amboise affair, so that we are in for a good deal of enjoyment."

"Yes, it will be a fine spectacle, *morbleu!*"

"And a spectacle at which our places are already assigned us, unless"—

"What do you mean by your 'unless'?"

"Unless—and this is quite possible—unless all judicial forms are dispensed with because of the rank of the prisoners, and so everything may be done under the rose, as the saying is."

"I rather fancy," said Maugiron, "the matter will be managed that way; you see it is the manner in which family affairs are usually dealt with, and this last conspiracy is a true family affair."

Aurilly looked anxiously at the prince.

"Faith," said Maugiron, "I am pretty certain of one thing, at least; if I were King I would not spare the high heads, for, in good truth, they are twice as guilty as the others in entering on this conspiracy business. These gentlemen apparently believe they can indulge with impunity in the pleasure of conspiring. I say, then, that I would bleed one or two of them, one especially; then I would drown all the small fry. The Seine is deep in front of the Nesle, and, if I were in the King's place, I could not resist the temptation; I give you my word of honor I could not."

"In that case," said Quéhus, "I think it would be no bad thing to revive the famous invention of the sacks."

"What invention was that?" asked Maugiron.

"Never heard of it? Oh, a royal invention dating from 1350, or thereabouts; you shut up a man in a sack with three or four cats and then throw the whole affair into the water.

The cats, you know, cannot endure a wetting, and are no sooner in the Seine than they set about paying off the man for the accident that happened to them. Then, certain things take place in the sack which, unfortunately, we shall not be able to see."

"In good truth," said Mangiron, "you are a well of science, Quélus, and your conversation is most interesting."

"This invention, however, cannot be applied to the chiefs. The chiefs have the right to decapitation in a public square, or to assassination in some private corner. But as to the small fry you spoke about, and by small fry I understand you to mean favorites, squires, stewards, lute-players" —

"Gentlemen," stammered Aurilly, pale with terror.

"Do not answer them, Aurilly," said François; "such words cannot be addressed to me, nor to my household, either. Princes of the blood are not a subject for such jeering in France."

"No," said Quélus, "they are treated in a far more serious fashion; they have their heads cut off. It was the mode of dealing with them affected by Louis XI., that great king! M. de Nemours was a proof of it."

The minions had got thus far in their dialogue when a noise was heard in the drawing-room, the door of the bed-chamber was opened, and the King stood on the threshold.

François rose.

"Sire," said he, "I appeal to your justice against the infamous treatment to which I am subjected by your people."

But Henri did not seem to see or hear his brother.

"Good day, Quélus," said he, kissing his favorite on both cheeks; "good day, my child, the sight of you rejoices my soul, and you, my poor Mangiron, how are we getting along?"

"I am bored to death," answered Mangiron. "I had imagined when I took charge of your brother, sire, that I should get some amusement out of him. But he is such a wearisome prince! I wonder can he really be the son of your father and mother!"

"You hear him, sire," said François. "Is it, then, your royal intention to have your brother insulted in this fashion?"

"Silence, monsieur," answered Henri, without even turning round, "I do not like to have my prisoners complaining."

"Prisoner as long as you wish; but this prisoner is not the less on that account your" —

"The title you are about to invoke is the very title that, to my mind, destroys you. A guilty brother is twice guilty."

"But if he is not guilty?"

"But he is."

"Of what crime?"

"That of displeasing me, monsieur."

"Sire," said the humiliated François, "our family quarrels should not have witnesses."

"You are right, monsieur. My friends, leave me for a moment, I wish to talk for a while with my brother."

"Sire," whispered Quélus, "it is not prudent for your Majesty to remain alone with two enemies."

"I'll take Aurilly with me," said Maugiron, in another whisper.

The two gentlemen led out Aurilly, who was at once burning with curiosity and dying of anxiety.

"So we are now alone," said the King.

"I was waiting impatiently for this moment, sire."

"And I also. Ah! you have been aiming at my crown, my worthy Eteocles. The League was to be your means and the throne your goal. So you were anointed in a remote church in a corner of Paris; you wanted to exhibit yourself suddenly to the Parisians, all glistening with holy oil!"

"Alas!" said François, crushed by the King's anger, "your Majesty will not allow me to speak."

"Why should I do so?" answered Henri; "in order to allow you to lie, or else to tell me things with which I am as well acquainted as you are? But no, you would lie, my good brother, for to confess what you have done would be to confess that you deserve death. You would lie, and I want to spare you that shame."

"Brother, brother," said François, wildly, "is it your intention to outrage me beyond endurance?"

"Then, if what I am about to say to you is an outrage, it is I who lie, and I ask for nothing better than to have a proof that what I say is a lie. Come, speak, speak. I am ready to listen: prove to me that you are not a traitor, and, what is worse, a clumsy traitor."

"I do not know what your Majesty means, and it seems as if you were determined to speak to me only in enigmas."

"Then I am going to make my words plain," said the King, in tones of menace that rang in the ears of François; "yes,

you have conspired against me, as formerly you conspired against my brother Charles; only that formerly you conspired with the aid of the King of Navarre; now you conspire with the aid of the Due de Guise. A fine scheme that excites my admiration and would, if successful, have given you a grand place in the history of usurpers. It is true that formerly you crawled like a serpent, and to-day would rend like a lion; after perfidy, open force; after poison, the sword."

"Poison! What do you mean, monsieur?" cried François, livid with rage, and, like the Eteocles to whom Henri had compared him, seeking a spot where he could strike Polynices with his flaming eyes, as he was powerless to do so with sword or dagger. "What poison?"

"The poison with which you assassinated our brother Charles; the poison you destined for Henri de Navarre, your associate. Oh, we all know about that fatal poison; our mother had already used it so often! That is the reason, I suppose, why you abandoned the thought of using it on me; that is the reason why you wished to pose as a captain and command the soldiery of the League. But look me well in the face, François," continued Henri, taking a threatening step toward his brother, "and learn there that a man of your cast of character will never kill a man of mine."

François staggered under the weight of this terrible attack. But, without regard or mercy for his prisoner, the King went on:

"The sword! The sword! I should like to see you alone with me in this chamber, and each of us with a sword in his hand. I have proved my superiority to you in astuteness, François, for I, too, have travelled along tortuous paths to reach the throne of France, and, while marching over these paths, I had to trample on the bodies of a million Poles to attain my object. Well and good! If you wish to show yourself my master in cunning, do so; but do so in my fashion; if you will imitate me, imitate me; but do not imitate me as a dwarf might imitate a giant. My intrigues have been royal intrigues, my craft has been the craft of a great captain. I repeat then, that in astuteness I have vanquished you, and that in a fair combat you would be slain. No longer dream of a successful contest with me in one way or the other; for from this moment I act as a King, a master, a despot; from this moment I have my eye on every one of your movements; from this moment I search you out in every one of your dark-

some retreats, and, at the least doubt, at the least suspicion, I lay my heavy hand on you, puny creature that you are, and fling you, gasping, under the axe of my executioner.

"And now you know what I had to say about our family affairs, my brother; now you know why I wished to speak with you face to face; now you know why I am about to order my friends to leave you alone to-night, so that you may have full leisure to meditate in your loneliness on my words.

"If the night, as we are told, brings good counsel along with it, it should surely bring good counsel to prisoners."

"And so," murmured the duke, "for a mere fanciful suspicion that bears a closer resemblance to a nightmare than to reality, I have lost your Majesty's favor?"

"Say, rather, you have been crushed by my justice."

"But at least, sire, fix a term to my captivity; let me know what I am to expect."

"When your sentence is read, you will know it."

"My mother! Can I not see my mother?"

"For what purpose? There were but three copies in the whole world of the famous hunting-book that killed my brother; and of the two that remain, one is in Florence and one in London. Besides, I am not a Nimrod, like my poor brother. Adieu, François."

The prince fell back on his armchair in utter despair.

"Gentlemen," said the King, again opening the door, "Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou has begged my permission to be allowed to reflect during the night on an answer he is to give me to-morrow morning. You will, therefore, leave him alone in his chamber, making him, however, such occasional visits as your prudence may dictate. You will, perhaps, find your prisoner a little excited by the conversation we have just had together; but remember that when M. d'Anjou conspired against me he renounced the title of my brother; consequently, there are none here except a captive and his guards. No ceremony, then; if the prisoner annoy you, inform me of the fact; I have the Bastille close at hand, and in the Bastille is Maître Laurent Testu, than whom there is no one in the world more fitted to control a rebellious temper."

"Sire! sire!" exclaimed François, making a final effort, "remember I am your"—

"You were also, if I do not mistake, the brother of Charles IX.," said Henri.

“But, at least, restore me my servants, my friends.”

“Are you complaining? Why, I am giving you mine, although it is to me a great privation.”

And Henri shut the door in the face of his brother, who staggered back, pale and trembling, and again sank into his chair.

CHAPTER LI.

WHICH PROVES THAT RUMMAGING IN EMPTY CLOSETS IS NOT ALWAYS A WASTE OF TIME.

THE scene in which the Duc d'Anjou and the King had just been actors led the prince to regard his situation as quite hopeless.

The minions had taken good care to inform him of everything that had occurred in the Louvre; they had exaggerated the defeat of the Guises and Henri's triumph, and he could hear the cries of the people shouting: “Long live the King! Long live the League!” All this was utterly incomprehensible to him, but he felt that he was abandoned by the principal leaders, and that they, too, had to defend their lives.

Forsaken by his family, which had been decimated by poisonings and assassinations, and divided by every sort of discord and animosity, he sighed as he recalled that past upon which the King had dwelt; then, in his struggle with Charles IX., he had always had for confidants, or rather dupes, those two devoted hearts, those two flaming swords, that bore the names of Coconnas and La Mole.

For many consciences remorse is but regret for lost advantages.

And yet, for the first time in his life, François, in his loneliness and isolation, did experience a kind of remorse at the thought of having sacrificed Coconnas and La Mole.

In those days his sister Marguerite had loved and consoled him. How had he rewarded that sister?

His mother, Queen Catherine, was left. But his mother had never liked him.

Whenever she had made use of him she used him as he did others, simply as an instrument.

And François, in pondering on the relative position of his

mother and himself, was candid. Once in her hands, he confessed that he was no more his own master than a ship is its own master when tossing on the ocean in the grip of the tempest.

And then he remembered that even lately he had close to him one heart that was worth a thousand hearts, one sword that was worth a thousand swords.

Bussy, the brave Bussy, came back to his memory and filled it to the exclusion of aught else.

Ah! now, most assuredly, the feeling he experienced was something like remorse. He had offended Bussy to please Monsoreau. He had wished to please Monsoreau because Monsoreau knew his secret, and lo, this secret, with which Monsoreau had threatened him, was in the possession of the King, and Monsoreau was no longer to be feared.

He had, therefore, quarrelled with Bussy uselessly and even gratuitously, a kind of action since described by a great statesman as worse than a crime, for it is a blunder!

Now, what an advantage it would have been for the prince in his present situation to be aware that Bussy, Bussy grateful and, consequently, faithful, was watching over him; Bussy the invincible; Bussy of the loyal heart; Bussy the universal favorite, for a noble heart and a heavy hand always make friends of those who have received from God the former, and from Fate the latter.

With Bussy watching over him, liberty would have been probable, vengeance would have been certain.

But, as we have said already, Bussy, wounded to the quick, had withdrawn from the prince and retired sullenly to his tent, and D'Anjou was there, a prisoner, with a depth of fifty feet to descend if he tried to reach the fosses, and four minions to disable if he tried to penetrate to the corridor.

And, moreover, the courtyards were full of Swiss and soldiers.

From time to time he went to the window and tried to sound the depth of these fosses; but the elevation was high enough to render even the bravest dizzy, and M. d'Anjou was far from being proof against dizziness.

In addition to all this, one of the prince's guards, now Schomberg, now Maugiron, at one time D'Épernon, at another Quélus, entered his chamber frequently, and acting as if he were not present, sometimes not even saluting him, went round

the apartment, opened doors and windows, searched closets and trunks, looked under beds and tables, and saw to it that the curtains were in their places and the bedclothes not cut up and twisted into ropes.

Occasionally they leaned out over the balcony; the distance of forty-five feet between it and the ground reassured them.

"By my faith," said Maugiron, after returning from one of those investigations, "I'm through with it; I won't budge from the drawing-room, and I must not be awakened every four hours to pay a visit to M. d'Anjou."

"I'm at one with you there," said D'Épernon. "Easy seeing we're great big babies, who have always been captains and never soldiers. Why, hang it, man, we don't even understand our instructions!"

"How can that be?" asked Quélus.

"What I say is God's truth. What does the King want? He wants us to guard, not to *regard*, M. d'Anjou."

"So much the better," answered Maugiron, "I don't object to guarding him, but as to regarding him! Why, he's as ugly as sin!"

"That's all very well," said Schomberg, "but we must keep our eyes open, for all that; the rascal beats the devil for cunning."

"I agree with you there," said D'Épernon; "but it requires something more than cunning to pass over the bodies of four blades like us."

And D'Épernon, drawing himself up to his full height, proudly twisted his mustache.

"D'Épernon is right," said Quélus.

"Oh, indeed?" retorted Schomberg. "Do you think M. d'Anjou such a donkey as to try to make his escape through our gallery? If he is absolutely set on getting out, he is capable of making a hole through the wall."

"With what? He has no weapons."

"What do you say to windows?" inquired Schomberg, but rather timidly, for he himself had measured with his eyes their height above the ground.

"Ah, the windows! upon my word, you are delightful," retorted D'Épernon. "The windows! bravo, Schomberg. Of course, I know you would take a jump of forty-five feet without winking, eh?"

"I confess that forty-five feet are rather" —

"Well! and this fellow who limps, who is so heavy, who is as timid as" —

"You are yourself," said Schomberg.

"My dear fellow," answered D'Épernon, "you know perfectly well I am afraid of nothing but ghosts; it is simply a matter of the nerves."

"His nervousness," said Quélus, gravely, "is accounted for by the fact that all those he killed in his duels appeared to him on the same night."

"We oughtn't to make light of it," said Maugiron; "I have read of hundreds of miraculous escapes — with the sheets, usually."

"Ah," said D'Épernon, "Maugiron's remark has some sense in it, at least. I myself saw a prisoner at Bordeaux who managed to get out by the help of his sheets."

"You see, then, a man can get out," remarked Schomberg.

"Yes," rejoined D'Épernon, "but he had his back broken and his brains dashed out for his pains. The rope he made was thirty feet too short; he had to jump for it; so that, though his body escaped from prison, his soul escaped from his body."

"Well, if he do escape," said Quélus, "we'll have a rattling fine hunt after a prince of the blood. We'll track him to his lair, and when we catch up with him we'll take devilish good care that there will be some part of his princely anatomy in a broken condition at the end of the chase."

"And by heavens!" cried Maugiron, "we'll then be acting our proper parts: we're hunters, not jailers."

This peroration wound up the discussion, and they turned to other subjects, though it was agreed they should visit the chamber of M. d'Anjou every hour or so.

The minions were perfectly correct in their supposition that the Duc d'Anjou would never attempt to gain his freedom by violence, and that, on the other hand, he would not venture on any escape that was perilous or difficult.

Not that this worthy prince was deficient in imagination, and we may as well say that his imagination was thoroughly excited whenever he walked from his bed to the famous cabinet occupied for two nights by La Mole, after he was saved by Marguerite, during the massacre of Saint Bartholomew.

From time to time the prince's pale face was glued to one of the panes of the window that overlooked the fosses of the Louvre.

Beyond the fosses stretched a sandy beach about fifteen feet wide, and, beyond the beach, the Seine could be seen through the darkness, rolling on with as smooth a surface as a mirror's.

On the other side of the river the Tour de Nesle loomed up out of the obscurity, standing like some motionless giant.

The Duc d'Anjou had watched the sunset in all its varying phases; had watched it with the interest a prisoner takes in such spectacles, in the gradual disappearance of light and the gradual coming on of darkness.

He had contemplated the wondrous spectacle afforded by old Paris and its roofs, gilded for an hour by the last gleams of the sunlight, and afterward silvered by the first beams of the moon. Then a feeling of extreme terror took hold of him when he saw immense clouds rolling along the sky and gathering above the Louvre, portending a storm during the night.

Among the Duc d'Anjou's many weaknesses, one was a dread of thunder.

The prince would now have given a great deal to have the minions guarding him in his chamber, though they insulted him the while.

However, he abandoned all idea of calling them in for such a purpose; their gibes and sneers would be unendurable.

He threw himself on his bed, but could not sleep; he tried to read, the characters whirled before his eyes like so many black devils; he tried to drink, the wine tasted bitter; he drew the tips of his fingers across the strings of Aurilly's lute, which hung from the wall, but the effect of the vibrations on his nerves was to make him shed tears.

Then he began swearing like a pagan and breaking everything within reach of his hand.

This was a family failing, to which every one residing in the Louvre was accustomed.

The minions half opened the door to see what was the meaning of this ear-splitting uproar; but as soon as they perceived it was only the prince amusing himself, they closed the door again, and this inflamed his fury to a higher degree than ever.

He had just broken a chair when there was a crash in the direction of the window; the sound could not be mistaken, it was the sound of broken glass, and, at the same moment, the prince felt a sharp pain in one of his hips.

His first idea was that he had been wounded by an arque-

buse-bullet, and that the shot had been fired by an emissary of the King.

"Ah! traitor! coward!" cried the prisoner, "you have had me killed in the way you threatened. Ah! I am dead!"

And he fell all in a heap on the carpet.

But, after falling, his hand came in contact with a somewhat hard object, more uneven, and larger, especially, than an arquebuse-bullet.

"Ha! a stone," said he; "was it a shot from a falconet?" But, in that case, I must have heard an explosion."

And at the same time he stretched out his leg; although the pain was acute enough, evidently there was no serious injury.

He picked up the stone and examined the pane.

The stone had been hurled with such force that, instead of shattering the glass, it had rather made a hole in it.

The stone appeared to be wrapped up in something like paper.

Then the duke's ideas took a different direction:

"What if this stone had been hurled by a friend, and not by an enemy?"

Drops of sweat stood on his forehead; hope, like fear, is often a source of anguish.

The duke approached the lamp.

Yes, he was right; a piece of paper was wrapped around the stone, and kept in its place by a silken cord knotted repeatedly.

The paper had naturally deadened the hardness of the flint; otherwise, the contusion felt by the prince would have been of a far more painful character.

To break the silk, unroll the paper, and read what was written on it, was the work of a moment.

"A letter," he murmured, looking stealthily around him.

And he read:

"Are you tired of keeping your room? Would you like the open air and freedom? Enter the little room in which the Queen of Navarre concealed your poor friend, M. de la Mole. Open the closet, and if you draw out the lowest shelf you will find a double bottom; in this double bottom there is a silk ladder. Fasten it with your own hands to the balcony. Two stout arms will hold the ladder firm at the bottom of the fosse. A horse, fleet as the wind, will carry you to a safe place.

"A friend."

"A friend!" cried the prince, "a friend! Oh! I did not know a friend was left me. Who can this friend be who thinks of me now?"

And the duke reflected for a moment, but he could not recall any friend to mind, and ran to look through the window. He saw nobody.

"What if it were a snare?" muttered the prince, in whom the first feeling awakened was always fear.

"But the first thing to find out," he added, "is whether this closet has a double bottom, and whether the double bottom contains a ladder."

The duke, then, leaving the lamp where it stood, and determined, for greater safety, to trust only to the evidence of his hands, directed his steps toward that cabinet he had so often entered once with beating heart, when he expected to find within it the Queen of Navarre, radiant in her dazzling beauty.

This time also, it must be confessed, the duke's heart beat violently.

He opened the closet, groping with his hands, examined all the shelves, and came at last to the bottom one. After pressing on it in several places without result, he pressed on one of the sides, and then the plank stood up.

As soon as he plunged his hand into the cavity it came in contact with the silk ladder.

Fleeing like a thief with his booty, the duke carried his treasure into his bedroom.

It struck ten. The duke at once thought of the visit paid him every hour. He hastened to conceal the ladder under the cushion of an armchair and sat on top of it.

The ladder had been so artistically constructed that it fitted easily into the narrow space where the duke buried it.

He was not too soon. Before five minutes, Maugiron in his dressing-gown made his appearance, with a sword under his left arm and a taper in his right hand.

All the time he was entering he kept up a conversation with his friends.

"The bear is furious," cried a voice; "just a moment ago he was smashing everything to pieces; take care he does not devour you, Maugiron."

"The insolent scoundrel!" murmured the duke.

"I believe your highness did me the honor to address me," said Maugiron, in his most impertinent manner.

The prince was very near giving expression to his rage, but, after reflecting that a quarrel would waste a good deal of time and, perhaps, prevent his escape, he curbed his fury, and wheeled round his chair, so as to turn his back on the young man.

Maugiron, following the usual course, approached the bed, examined the sheets, and saw that the window curtains were undisturbed. He perceived quickly that a pane of glass was broken, but concluded it was the work of the prince, who must have smashed it in his anger.

"Hello, Maugiron," cried Schomberg. "are you eaten already that you do not speak? Can't you give a groan, at least, that we may know what has happened and avenge you?"

The duke cracked the joints of his fingers in his impatience.

"Oh, no," answered Maugiron, "on the contrary, my bear is very gentle, and quite tame."

The duke smiled silently in the darkness.

As for Maugiron, he passed out without even saluting the prince, a politeness certainly due to so puissant a lord, and then double-locked the door.

The prince made no observation, but when the key no longer grated in the lock, he murmured:

"Gentlemen, beware! The bear is a very sharp-witted beast!"

CHAPTER LII.

VENTRE SAINT-GRIS.

WHEN the Duc d'Anjou was alone, and knew that he would not be disturbed for at least an hour, he drew his ladder from underneath the cushion, partially unrolled it, examined every knot, and all with the utmost care.

"The ladder," said he, "is all right and is not offered me as a contrivance for getting my ribs broken."

Then he unrolled the remainder of it and counted thirty-eight rungs fifteen inches apart.

"Well and good!" he thought, "the length is sufficient; nothing to be feared in that respect."

After this, he reflected for a moment.

"Ah!" said he, "now that I think of it, what if it were those infernal minions who sent me this ladder? I would fasten it to the balcony, they would not interfere, and, just after I began my descent, they would come and cut the cords: is that the snare, I wonder?"

And he became thoughtful again.

"But no," he said, "that is not possible: they are not so silly as to imagine I should descend without first barricading the door, and, the door once barricaded, they would know I should have time to escape before they burst it in.

"It is the very thing I should do," he thought, looking round him, "the very thing I would do if I decided on fleeing.

"And, moreover, how could they imagine I had discovered this ladder in the closet of the Queen of Navarre? Who, except my sister Marguerite, could have any idea of its existence?"

"But then," he continued, "who is the friend? The note is signed: 'A friend.' What friend of the Duc d'Anjou is acquainted with the secret bottoms in the closets of my apartments and my sister's?"

And having propounded and, as he believed, victoriously solved this problem, the duke read the letter a second time to see if he could recognize the handwriting. Then a thought suddenly struck him.

"Bussy!" he cried.

Yes, in very truth, was it not Bussy? Bussy, adored by so many great ladies, Bussy, who seemed such a hero to the Queen of Navarre that, as she acknowledges in her memoirs, she uttered cries of terror every time he fought a duel; Bussy the circumspect, Bussy, an adept in the science of closets. Was not Bussy the only friend among all his friends upon whom the Duc d'Anjou could really rely? Was not Bussy, in all probability, then, the sender of this note? And yet —

The prince felt more and more puzzled at the idea of his former favorite's intervention.

But still, everything combined to persuade him that Bussy was the author of the letter. The duke was not aware of all the reasons that gentleman had for disliking him, as he was ignorant of his love for Diane de Méridor. It is true he had a faint suspicion of his follower's passion. Loving Diane himself, he suspected that Bussy could hardly have seen this

beautiful woman without loving her also. But this slight suspicion was effaced by other considerations. Moreover, Bussy was so loyal-hearted that he could not remain idle at a time when his master was in fetters, and, in addition to this, he was the kind of person to be seduced by the spice of adventure in such an expedition; he had determined, then, to avenge the duke in his own way, that is to say, by restoring him to liberty. The prince could no longer have a doubt; it was Bussy who had written the letter; it was Bussy who was waiting for him.

To become, if possible, a little more sure of the fact, he approached the window.

He saw in the fog that rose from the river three indistinct oblong forms, which, he thought, must be horses, and two figures, not unlike posts and apparently fixed firmly in the sand of the beach, which must surely be two men.

Yes, two men, undoubtedly: Bussy and his trusty Le Haudouin.

"The temptation is too great to be withstood," murmured the duke, "and the snare, if snare there be, is too artistically planned to make me ashamed of myself if I be caught in it."

François next looked through the hole in the lock of the door opening on the drawing-room; his four guards were there: two were asleep, and the two others were playing at chess on Chicot's chessboard.

He extinguished the light.

Then he opened the window and leaned out over the balcony.

The gulf whose depth he tried to fathom was rendered more appalling by the darkness that covered it.

He recoiled.

But air and space have such an irresistible attraction for a prisoner that François, on returning to his room, felt as if he were stifling.

So strong was the emotion he experienced that something like a disgust for life and an indifference to death passed through his mind.

The prince was amazed, and imagined he was becoming courageous.

Then, taking advantage of this moment of excitement, he seized the silk ladder and fastened it to his balcony by the hooks placed at one end of it for the purpose. Next, he entered his room and barricaded the door as thoroughly as he was able to do, and, sure now that it would take his guards at least ten



A TERROR HE COULD NOT RESIST HELD FRANÇOIS IN ITS CLUTCHES.

minutes to vanquish the obstacle he had just created, that is to say, more time than he needed to reach the last rung in his ladder, he returned to the window.

He tried to make out, a second time, the outlines of the men and horses in the distance, but he was unable to distinguish any object.

"I don't know," he murmured, "but this would be safer. To escape alone is far better than to escape in company with your best-known friend, and infinitely better than to escape with an unknown friend."

At this moment the darkness was complete, and the first growlings of the storm that was approaching during the last hour began to rumble in the heavens. A big cloud with silvery fringes stretched from one side of the river to the other; it resembled an elephant at rest, its crupper supported by the palace, its proboscis, irregularly curved, passing over the Tour de Nesle and vanishing in the southern extremity of the city. A flash of lightning rent for a moment this immense cloud, and the prince thought he could perceive the persons he had vainly sought for on the beach in the fosse beneath him.

A horse neighed. There could be no doubt now. They were waiting for him.

The duke shook the ladder to test the solidity of the fastening: then he climbed over the balustrade and placed a foot on the first round.

It would be impossible to describe the terrible anguish that at this moment wrung the heart of the prisoner, placed as he was between the solitary support of a frail siiken strand and the deadly menaces of his brother.

But, as he stood there, it seemed to him that the ladder instead of oscillating, as he had expected, stiffened, on the contrary, and that the second round met his other foot, without the ladder appearing to make the rotatory movement naturally to be expected in such circumstances.

Was a friend or an enemy holding the bottom of the ladder? Would open, friendly arms receive him when he reached the last round, or arms bearing hostile weapons?

A terror he could not resist held François in its clutches; his left hand still rested on the balcony, he made a movement as if he would return.

It looked as if the invisible person who awaited the prince at the foot of the wall divined everything that was passing

through his heart : for, at that very moment, there was a slight pull at the ladder, repeated softly and regularly ; it was a sort of silken invitation reaching even to the feet of the duke.

"From the way they are holding the ladder," he thought, "they evidently do not want me to fall. Now or never is the time for courage."

And he continued his descent : the two supports of the rungs of the ladder were as rigid as if they were sticks. François noticed that his rescuers were careful to keep the rungs away from the wall, so as to give him a better footing.

Therupon, François shot downward like an arrow, making hardly any use of the rungs, but gliding along with his hands, and tearing his cloak in his rapid descent.

Suddenly, instead of touching the earth, which he felt instinctively to be close to his feet, he was caught in the arms of a man, who whispered these three words in his ear :

"You are saved !"

Then he was carried to the opposite side of the fosse and hurried along a road from which masses of earth and stone sloped down on either side. At length, a man seized him by the collar and drew him up to the crest of the ditch, and, after aiding the companion of François in the same way, ran to the river. The horses were in the place where the duke had first seen them.

He knew there was no drawing back now : he was at the mercy of his saviors, so he leaped on one of the horses ; his companions mounted the two others.

The same voice that had already whispered in his ear said with the same brevity :

"Spur."

And the three men set off at a gallop.

"So far, all goes well," thought the prince, "it is to be hoped the end will not belie the promise of the beginning."

"Thanks, my brave Bussy," said he in a low murmur to his comrade on the right, whose face was muffled up in a big brown cloak.

"Spur," was the only answer given from behind the cloak, and as the speaker himself gave the example, the three horses passed on like the wind.

In this fashion they arrived at the great fosse of the Bastile, which they crossed on a bridge improvised the night before by the Leaguers, who were unwilling to have their communica-

tions with their friends interrupted, and had adopted this plan to ensure the concentration of their members where it was needed.

The three riders pushed on toward Charenton. The prince's horse seemed to have wings.

Suddenly the man on his right leaped the fosse and dashed into the forest of Vincennes, saying, with his usual earnestness, this one word to the prince:

"Come."

The man on the left imitated the man on the right, but without speaking. In fact, during the whole journey, a word had never left his lips.

The prince did not need to draw the reins tight or press the flanks of his steed with his knees; the noble animal leaped the fosse with the same ardor exhibited by the two other horses. The neigh he gave when clearing the ditch was answered by several neighs from the depths of the forest.

The prince tried to stop his horse, for he feared he was being led into an ambuscade.

But it was too late; the animal was too excited to feel the bit; however, on seeing the other horses slacken their paces, the charger of François also came to a trot, and the duke soon found himself in a sort of clearing where eight or ten men on horseback, drawn up in military array, were revealed to his eyes by the moonlight, which was reflected on their cuirasses, turning them to silver.

"Monsieur," said the prince, "pray, what does this mean?"

"*Ventre saint-gris!*" answered the man whom he had questioned, "it means we are safe."

"What! you, Henri!" cried the Duc d'Anjou, in amazement, "you are my liberator?"

"Egad," said the Béarnais, "I do not see why that should surprise you. Are we not allies?"

Then, looking round for his other companion:

"Agrippa," said he, "where the devil are you?"

"Here I am," said D'Aubigné, who had kept grimly silent until now. "You ought to be proud of yourself; the way you treat your horses!—especially as you have so many of them!"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, stop your growling; if I can only get two fresh horses, that had a rest, and are capable of doing their dozen leagues without stopping, it's all I need."

"But where are you taking me, cousin?" asked François, uneasily.

"Wherever you wish," answered Henri; "but we must go quickly, for D'Aubigné is right: the King of France has better furnished stables than I have, and he is rich enough to afford killing a score of horses, if he take it into his head to catch up with us."

"So, then, I am really free to go where I like?" inquired François.

"Of course; I am simply at your orders," replied Henri.

"Well, then, I wish to go to Angers."

"You wish to go to Angers? To Angers let us go, then; you are naturally at home in that quarter."

"And where are you going, cousin?"

"Oh, as soon as we come in sight of Angers I leave you and spur for Navarre, where my good Margot is waiting for me; she must be terribly bored at having to live so long without me!"

"But did any one know you were in Paris?" said François.

"I suppose not. I only came to sell three diamonds belonging to my wife."

"Ah, indeed!"

"And I wanted to find out, too, if the League was really going to ruin me."

"You see it amounts to nothing."

"Yes, thanks to you."

"Thanks to me! how?"

"Why, if, instead of refusing to be chief of the League, when you learned it was directed against me, you had accepted the command and made common cause with my enemies, I should have been ruined. So, when I found out the King had imprisoned you for your refusal, I swore to rescue you, and I have done so."

"He is always so simple," said François to himself. "that it is really a conscientious duty to deceive him."

"Go, cousin, go to Anjou," said the Béarnais, with a smile.

"Aha, M. de Guise, you think you rule the roost! But I am sending you a friend that will, perhaps, trip you up occasionally; look out!"

And as soon as the fresh horses were brought which Henri had ordered, both of them leaped into the saddles and set off at a gallop, accompanied by Agrippa d'Aubigné, who never stopped growling.

CHAPTER LIII

THE FRIENDS.

WHILE Paris was flaming and boiling like the interior of a furnace, Madame de Monsoreau, escorted by her father and two of those servants who at that period were temporarily recruited for an expedition like the present one, was making her way to Méridor by stages of ten leagues a day.

She was also beginning to enjoy that freedom which is so precious to those who have suffered.

The azure sky of the country, which had nothing in keeping with the eternally threatening sky that hung above the black towers of the Bastile like a pall, the trees already green, the beautiful lanes, winding like long, undulating ribbons through the heart of the forest, appeared to her as fresh and young, as novel and delectable as if she had really just escaped from the watery grave in which her father had believed her buried.

As for the old baron, he looked twenty years younger.

From the erectness of his bearing in the saddle, and the fire with which he urged on old Jarnac, a spectator might be excused if he took the noble lord for some graybeard husband on his wedding-tour, watching amorously over his youthful bride.

We will not attempt to describe this long journey.

Sunrise and sunset embraced its most important incidents.

When the moon illuminated with silvery tints the windows of her chamber in some hostelry on the road, Diane usually leaped out of bed, awoke the baron, aroused her servants from their heavy slumbers, and the whole party set out again, guided on their way by the lovely moonlight, all to gain a few leagues during this long journey, which the young woman thought would never have an end.

At other times, just in the heat of a gallop, she would allow Jarnac, quite proud on such occasions of being in the lead, to shoot past her, then the rest of her escort to do the same, and, halting on some rising ground, would turn round and peer into the depths of the valley to discover whether she was followed. When the valley was evidently deserted, and Diane could see nothing but the flocks and herds scattered along the pastures, or the solemn spire of some village church towering aloft at

the end of a highway, she returned more impatient than ever.

Whereupon, her father, glancing at her from the corner of his eye, would say :

“ Do not be afraid, Diane.”

“ Afraid of what, father ? ”

“ Are you not looking to see if M. de Monsoreau is following ? ”

“ Ah — yes — you are right ; that is why I was looking,” answered the young woman, with another glance behind her.

And so, after many a hope, and fear, and disappointment, Diane reached the Castle of Méridor at the end of a week, and was received on the drawbridge by Madame de Saint-Luc and her husband, who had acted as lord and lady of the manor during the baron's absence.

Then began for these four people one of those existences of which every one has dreamed who has read Virgil, Longus, and Theocritus.

The baron and Saint-Luc hunted from morning to night, followed closely by their whippers-in.

Then might be seen a very avalanche of dogs rolling down the hillsides at the tail of a fox or hare, and when this furious cavalcade thundered past them into the woods, Diane and Jeanne, seated side by side on some mossy mound in the shade of a thicket, would start for a moment, but soon renew their tender and mysterious conversation.

“ Tell me,” said Jeanne, “ tell me all that happened to you in your tomb, for you were, indeed, dead for us. Look ! the hawthorn is in flower, and shedding on us its little snowflakes, and the guelder-roses waft toward us their intoxicating perfume. The soft sunlight laughs amid the huge oaken branches. Not a breath in the air, not a living being in the park, for the roebucks have disappeared, dismayed by the trembling of the earth under the hoof-beat of the horses, and the foxes have vanished into their holes. Tell me everything, my little sister.”

“ Did I not tell you something already ? ”

“ You told me nothing. Are you happy, then ? Ah ! those beautiful eyes encircled by bluish shadows, the pearly paleness of your cheeks, the drooping eyelid, the mouth that tries to smile and never completely succeeds — Diane, Diane, you must, indeed, have much to tell me.”

“ Nothing, I assure you.”

"Then, you are happy — with M. de Monsereau?"

Diane started.

"You see you would deceive me," said Jeanne, reproachfully but tenderly.

"With M. de Monsoreau!" repeated Diane; "why do you utter that name? Why do you raise up that spectre in the midst of these woods, in the midst of these flowers, in the midst of our happiness?" —

"Well, I know now why your eyes are encircled with blue, and why they are so often raised to heaven; but I know not yet why your lips try to smile."

Diane sadly shook her head.

"You told me, I think," continued Jeanne, flinging her white, round arm about Diane's neck, "that M. de Bussy has taken great interest in you."

Diane blushed so deeply that her little delicate ears seemed inflamed.

"A charming cavalier is M. de Bussy," said Jeanne. And she sang:

"As a picker of quarrels
D'Amboise has won laurels."

Diane rested her head on her friend's bosom, and, in a voice sweeter than the warbling of the birds amid the foliage, she murmured:

"But give Bussy his due —
He is tender and'" —

"True!" exclaimed Jeanne, joyously, kissing her friend's eyes.

"Oh, this is all folly," said Diane, abruptly. "M. de Bussy d'Amboise no longer thinks of Diane de Méridor."

"Possibly," answered Jeanne: "but I am rather inclined to believe that Diane de Monsoreau still thinks of him."

"You must not say so."

"Why? Because it vexes you?"

Diane did not reply. Then, after a pause, she murmured:

"I tell you he thinks no more of me — and he does well. Oh! I have been such a coward!"

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing, nothing."

"Now, Diane, you are going to cry, and to blame yourself — You a coward! you, my heroine! you were forced to act as you did."

"I believed so. I saw dangers, saw a perilous gulf beneath my feet. But now, Jeanne, all these dangers seem to me imaginary; a child might cross that gulf with a single stride. I was a coward, I tell you. Oh! if I had only had time to reflect!"

"What you tell me is to me an enigma."

"Yet, no, it was not so," said Diane, rising in great agitation. "No, it was not my fault, Jeanne; *he* it was who drew back. I remember how terrible my position appeared; I hesitated, I wavered. My father offered me his support and I was afraid. *He*, *he* offered me his protection, but not in a way to encourage me to accept it. The Duc d'Anjou was against him; the Duc d'Anjou was in league with M. de Monsoreau, you will tell me. Well, what if they were leagued together? Ah! if I were really determined on achieving an object, if I loved any one with my whole heart, not all the princes and masters in Christendom could hold me back; for, Jeanne, once I truly loved" —

And Diane, overcome by her emotion, leaned back against an oak, as if the soul had so tortured the body that the latter could no longer stand upright.

"Come, come, my darling, collect yourself, try to be calm" —

"I tell you *we* have been *cowards*!"

"*We* — Diane, to whom do you allude? That *we* is full of significance."

"I am speaking of my father and myself; I hope you did not understand me to speak of anybody else, did you? My father is a nobleman of rank and could have spoken to the King; and I am proud and do not fear a man when I hate him — But — the secret of my cowardice was this: I saw *he* did not love me."

"You are false to your own heart!" cried Jeanne. "If you believed that, you would, from what I know of you, go to the man himself and reproach him with his baseness. But you do not believe it; you know that the contrary is the fact, hypocrite!" she added, with a tender caress.

"Oh, it is natural for you to believe in love," answered Diane, again sitting down beside Jeanne; "you whom Saint-Lue married in spite of a king! you whom he bore away from the very centre of Paris! you who pay him by your caresses for proscription and exile!"

"And he ought to think that he is richly paid, too," said the roguish young woman.

“But I—reflect a little and be not so selfish—I whom this fiery young man pretended to love, I who attracted the admiration of the indomitable Bussy, of that man who laughs at obstacles—I espoused him as it were publicly, I offered myself to him before the eyes of the entire court, and he did not even look at me; I placed myself under his protection in the cloister of Saint Mary of Egypt: we were alone, except for the presence of Gertrude and Le Handouin, his two accomplices—I a more willing accomplice than either— Oh, when I think of it! His horse stood at the door; he could have borne me off from the very church in a fold of his cloak! For, at that moment, look you, I felt that he was disconsolate and heartbroken on account of me; I saw that his eyes were dull, his lips bloodless and parched with fever. If my death could have restored the lustre of his eyes, the ruddiness of his lips, and he had asked for my life, I would have gladly surrendered it at that moment. Well! I started to leave the church, and he did not attempt to hold me back by a corner of my veil! Wait, wait awhile— Ah! you do not know what I am suffering. He knew that I was departing from Paris, he knew I was returning to Méridor, he knew—hold! I blush to say it—he knew that M. de Monsoreau is not my husband, except in name, he knew I was travelling alone, and every few minutes on the road I turned and turned, dear Jeanne, thinking I heard his horse’s gallop behind us. Nothing! it was the echo of the hoofs of our own horses that came to my ear. I tell you he never thinks of me; I am not worth a journey to Anjou, as long as there are so many fair and gracious women at the court of the King of France, whose smiles have a greater charm for him than the fond devotion of a provincial buried in the woods of Méridor. Do you understand now? Are you convinced? Am I not right? Am I not forgotten and despised, my poor Jeanne?”

She had scarcely finished when the foliage of the oak rustled; a quantity of moss and broken mortar rolled down from the old wall, and a man, bounding through the middle of the ivy and wild mulberries, appeared before Diane. He flung himself on his knees, and the young woman uttered a cry of terror.

Jeanne stole away the moment she saw and recognized this man.

“You know now you are not forgotten,” murmured Bussy,

kissing, as he knelt, the hem of Diane's robe, which he held respectfully in his trembling hand.

She, too, recognized the voice, the smile of the count, and, stunned, overpowered, maddened by this unlooked-for happiness, she opened her arms, and fell, swooning and unconscious, on the breast of the man she had just accused of indifference.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE LOVERS.

Swoons occasioned by joy are neither very long nor very dangerous. There have been cases where such swoons resulted in death, but they are exceedingly rare.

Diane, therefore, soon opened her eyes and found herself lying in Bussy's arms, for Bussy had determined that the first look of his mistress should not be for Madame de Saint-Luc.

"Oh!" she murmured, when she awoke. "oh! to surprise us in this manner, count, is frightful!"

Bussy had expected to be greeted by words of a different kind.

And who knows — men are so unreasonable — who knows, we repeat, if he did not expect something more than words, having so large an experience of women who returned to life after fainting-fits and trances?

Not only did Diane disappoint any such expectation, if he entertained it, but she gently freed herself from the arms that held her captive, and returned to her friend. That friend had at first proved her discretion by going for a walk under the adjoining trees; then, interested, as every woman would be, in the charming spectacle of a reconciliation of lovers, she came back at a leisurely pace, not with the intention of taking part in the conversation, but determined not to lose a word of it, either.

"What, madame, is this the way you receive me?" asked Bussy.

"No," said Diane, "for, in good truth, M. de Bussy, I am conscious of the tenderness and affection that led you here — But" —

"Oh, for mercy's sake, no 'buts,'" sighed Bussy, falling again on his knees before Diane.

"No, no, not on your knees, pray, M. de Bussy."

"Oh!" said the count, clasping his hands, "allow me to stay here and pray to you as I am doing. I have so longed for this moment."

"Yes, but in order to come here you have climbed over the wall, a proceeding unbecoming in a man of your rank, and decidedly imprudent in a man who has some concern for my honor."

"Why?"

"What if you have been seen?"

"Who could see me?"

"Our hunters, who rode through the thicket behind the wall scarcely a quarter of an hour ago."

"Oh, do not be uneasy, madame, I am too careful to allow myself to be discovered; I am too well disguised."

"Disguised!" cried Jeanne, "how romantic! Tell us about it, M. de Bussy."

"Let me say, in the first place, that, if I did not overtake you, it was not my fault: I took one road, you another; you went by Rambouillet, I by Chartres. Besides, just listen and judge whether your poor Bussy is in love. I did not dare to join you, although I have very little doubt that I could: I was pretty well aware that Jarnac was not in love and that the worthy animal would not be in any great hurry to return to Méridor; your father, too, must have been but little inclined to push forward, for he had you beside him. But I did not care to meet you in the company of your father or in the presence of your servants, for I am more anxious than you believe to do nothing that might compromise you; so I made the journey stage by stage, too excited to eat or drink; in fact, the knob of my riding-switch was my only food during the time; I gnawed it incessantly in my impatience."

"Poor boy!" said Jeanne; "no wonder he has grown so thin."

"At length you reached Angers," continued Bussy; "I had hired lodgings in a suburb of the city, and, hidden behind a window-blind, I saw you pass."

"But," asked Diane, "you are surely not staying at Angers under your own name?"

"For whom do you take me?" answered Bussy, with a smile; "no, I am a travelling merchant; admire my cinnamon-colored costume; it disguises me, I think, perfectly, and

is a color very fashionable among drapers and goldsmiths, and then again, my restless, bustling manners would square admirably with an apothecary searching for simples. In short, no one has taken the slightest notice of me."

"Bussy, the handsome Bussy, two successive days in a provincial city and never noticed!" exclaimed Madame de Saint-Luc. "It will never be believed at court."

"Continue, count," said Diane, blushing, "tell us how you came here from the city."

"I have two fine thoroughbreds; I mount one of them and ride slowly from the city, stopping occasionally to gape at the placards and signs. But, as soon as I am far enough from prying eyes, I set my horse to a gallop, and in twenty minutes I clear the ten and a half miles between here and the city. Once in the wood of Méridor, I set about finding my way and reach the park wall. But it is long, oh, very long, indeed, and the park, too, is very large. Yesterday I spent more than four hours in taking the bearings of this wall, climbing here and there in hopes to catch a glimpse of you. I had grown almost desperate, when I perceived you last evening returning to the house; the baron's two big dogs were leaping after you, and Madame de Saint-Luc was holding up a partridge which they tried to jump at; then you vanished.

"With a jump and a leap, I was myself on the spot where you were sitting just now; I noticed the trampled appearance of the grass and moss, and concluded that this charming place was your preferred retreat during the heat of the sun; to make sure of not mistaking my way to this point again, I did as hunters are in the habit of doing, I broke off brambles here and there on my return, all the while sighing; a thing that hurts me frightfully"—

"Because you are not accustomed to it," said Jeanne, smiling.

"You may be right, madame, but allow me to repeat the phrase: all the while sighing, a thing that hurts me frightfully, I make my way back to the city: I was awfully tired, and, to add to my misery, I had torn my cinnamon doublet while climbing the trees; still, despite the rents in my raiment, despite the weight on my breast, there was joy in my heart: I had seen you."

"Why, your tale is admirable, and admirably told," said Jeanne; "and what terrible obstacles you have surmounted!

No wonder they call you a hero! Still, if I, who would not climb a tree for the world, had happened to be in your place, I should have taken a little care of my doublet and spared my beautiful white hands. Look in what a lamentable condition yours are, all scratched by thorns."

"Yes, but in that case I should not have seen the person I came to see."

"You are quite mistaken; I should have seen Diane de Méridor, and Madame de Saint-Luc, too, if I cared to, without taking half the trouble you did."

"What would you have done, then?" inquired Bussy, eagerly.

"I should have gone straight to the bridge of the castle of Méridor, and then crossed it. M. le Baron would have taken me in his arms, Madame de Monsoreau would have invited me to a seat by her side at table, M. de Saint-Luc would have been delighted to see me, and I and Madame de Saint-Luc should have made anagrams together. Why, it would have been the simplest thing in the world; but the simplest thing in the world is just the thing lovers never think of."

Bussy shook his head with a smile and a glance addressed to Diane.

"Oh, no!" he said, "no; that might have been all very well for any one else to do, but not for me."

Diane blushed like a child, and the same smile and glance were reflected in her eyes and on her lips.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Jeanne; "so now, it seems, I am quite ignorant of the manners of polite society!"

"No!" said Bussy, with another shake of the head. "No! I could not go to the castle. Madame is married; it is M. le Baron's duty to watch over his daughter with the strictest vigilance, a duty he owes his daughter's husband."

"Oh, thank you, M. de Bussy!" said Jeanne; "you are kind enough to give me another lesson in the art of good breeding; thanks again, M. de Bussy, I deserved it at your hands; this will teach me to meddle with the affairs of mad people in future."

"Mad people?" repeated Diane.

"Mad people or lovers," answered Madame de Saint-Luc, "and consequently" —

She kissed Diane on the forehead, made a sweeping courtesy to Bussy, and fled.

Diane tried to detain her with a hand which Bussy seized ; being interfered with by her lover in this imperious fashion, she had to let Jeanne go.

Bussy and Diane were now alone.

Diane turned her eyes reproachfully on Madame de Saint-Luc, who was picking flowers as she went along, and then sat down blushing.

Bussy flung himself at her feet.

"Have I not acted rightly, madame," said he ; "and do you not approve of what I have done ?"

"I will not feign," answered Diane ; "and besides, you know what is in my heart. Yes, I approve ; but my indulgence must not go further. When I wished for you, called for you, as I did just now, I was beside myself — and I was guilty."

"Great heavens ! what are you saying now, Diane ?"

"Alas, count, I am saying the truth ! I have the right to render M. de Monsoreau, who has driven me to this extremity, unhappy, but this right belongs to me only as long as I decline to make another happy. I may refuse him my society, my smiles, my love ; but if I granted those favors to another, I should be robbing one who, after all, is my master."

Bussy listened impatiently to this ethical disquisition, softened, it is true, by the gracious gentleness of Diane.

"It is my turn to speak now, is it not ?" said he.

"Speak," answered Diane.

"Frankly ?"

"Speak !"

"Well, madame, of all you have just said you have not found a single word in your heart."

"Why ?"

"Listen to me patiently, madame ; you will acknowledge that I have listened patiently to you. You have, literally, overwhelmed me with sophisms."

Diane started.

"The commonplaces of morality," continued Bussy, "have not the slightest bearing on the present situation. In exchange for your sophisms, madame, I will give you truths. A man, you say, is your master, but did you choose this master ? No ; an evil fate imposed him on you, and you submitted. You mean to endure for a whole lifetime the consequences of that odious infliction ? Then it is my duty to save you from them."

Diane opened her lips to speak. Bussy stopped her with a gesture.

"Oh, I know what you would answer," said the young man. "You would answer that, should I challenge M. de Monsoreau, and kill him, you would never see me again — so be it, then! I shall die of the grief of not seeing you, but you will live free, will live happy, will have it in your power to bestow happiness on some worthy man, who, in his joy, will now and then bless my name, and say: 'Thanks, Bussy, thanks, for rescuing us from that abominable Monsoreau!' and you yourself, Diane, who would not dare to thank me while living, would thank me when I am dead."

The young woman seized the count's hand and pressed it tenderly.

"You threaten me, Bussy," said she, "even before you have sued me for a single favor."

"Threaten you? Ah! God is listening to me and he knows what my intentions are; I love you so ardently, Diane, that I shall not act like other men. I know you love me. Great God! why should you deny it and class yourself with those vulgar souls whose deeds belie their words! I know you love me, for you have confessed it. Now, a love like mine is like the genial sunlight and quickens every heart it touches; and so, I will not sue, I will not waste away in despair. No, I will fall down at your knees and kiss them, and, with my right hand on my heart, that heart that has never lied, either from interest or fear, I will say to you: 'Diane, I love you, and that love is the love of my entire life! I swear in the face of Heaven that I am ready to die for you, and die adoring you.' If you still answer: 'Go, do not rob another of his happiness,' I will rise without a sigh, without a sign, from this spot where I am so happy, and after a last farewell, I will say to myself: 'This woman does not love me; this woman will never love me.' Then I will depart and never more shall you set eyes on me again. But, as my devotion is even greater than my love, as my desire to see you happy will survive the certainty that I cannot be happy myself, as I shall not have deprived another of his happiness, I shall have the right of depriving him of his life while, at the same time, sacrificing my own. This is what I shall do, madame, and I shall do it that you may not be a slave forever and may no longer point

to your present situation as an excuse for making unhappy the generous hearts that love you."

Bussy had been deeply moved while uttering these words. Diane read in his faithful and brilliant eyes the strength of his resolve; she knew that he would do what he said he would do, that his words would infallibly have their fulfilment in his deeds: and, as the snows of April melt away under the rays of the sun, her resistance melted away under the fire of his eyes.

"Well," said she, "I thank you for the violence with which you assail me. It is another proof of your delicacy to save me in this way from the remorse of having yielded to you. And now, will you love me, as you have said, even till death? Shall I not, perhaps, be the plaything of your fancy for a time and then left to regret that I did not listen to the odious love of M. de Monsoreau? But no, I have no conditions to make. I am vanquished; I surrender. I am yours, Bussy, at least in love. Remain, then, dearest, and since now my life is yours, watch over yourself as well as over me."

While speaking, Diane placed one of her delicate white hands on Bussy's shoulder, and tendered to him the other, which he held lovingly pressed to his lips; Diane trembled under that kiss.

Then they heard the light footsteps of Jeanne, accompanied by a little warning cough.

She had in one hand a bunch of fresh flowers and in the other the first butterfly that had, perhaps, ventured out of its silken shell, an Atalanta with red and black wings.

The clasped hands instinctively parted.

Jeanne noticed the movement.

"Forgive me, my good friends," said she, "for disturbing you, but if you do not return to the house we'll have a servant coming after us. M. le Comte, you will have the goodness to betake yourself to whatever spot holds that thoroughbred horse of yours which makes twelve miles in half an hour, and you will also have the kindness to permit me and Diane to make — as slowly as possible, for I imagine we'll have a good deal to talk about — the fifteen hundred steps between us and the castle. Ah, M. de Bussy, you see now what you are losing by your obstinacy — a dinner at the castle, not to be despised, I assure you, especially by a man who amuses himself by climbing over walls after a long ride, and a lot of merry

stories told by you to me and by me to you, not to reckon a certain number of glances exchanged, the sort of glances that set the heart beating awfully. Come, Diane, let us return," and Jeanne took her friend's arm and made a slight effort to draw her along.

Bussy looked at the two friends with a smile. Diane, half turned toward him, held out her hand.

He approached them.

"Well," he asked, "is that all you have to say to me?"

"On to-morrow," she said; "was not that understood?"

"On to-morrow only?"

"On to-morrow and forever!"

Bussy could not keep from uttering a cry of joy; he pressed his lips on Diane's hand; then, with a last adieu to the two women, he started away, or, rather, fled.

He felt that only by a strong effort of his will could he bring himself to leave the woman with whom he had never hoped to be united.

Diane followed him with her eyes until he had plunged into the depths of the thicket; even then she forced her friend to stop as long as she could hear the echo of his footsteps in the brushwood.

"And now," said Jeanne, when Bussy had quite disappeared, "suppose we talk a little, Diane."

"Oh, yes, yes," said the young woman, starting as if her friend's voice awoke her from a dream, "I am listening to you."

"Very good. I want to tell you I intend hunting to-morrow with Saint-Luc and your father."

"Oh, surely you would not leave me all by myself in the castle?"

"Listen, my dear friend," answered Jeanne. "I too have my own principles of morality, and there are certain things which I cannot consent to do."

"Oh, Jeanne!" cried Madame de Monsoreau, turning pale; "can you use such hard words to me — to me, your friend?"

"Friendship has nothing to do with the matter," said Madame de Saint-Luc, as tranquilly as before; "this cannot continue."

"I thought you loved me, Jeanne, and now you wound me to the quick," said the young woman, with tears in her eyes. "This cannot continue, you say; what is it, then, you would not have continue?"

"I cannot continue," murmured Jeanne in her ears, "hindering you and him, poor lovers as you are, from loving each other at your ease."

Diane clasped the laughing young woman in her arms, and covered her roguish face with kisses.

While she was holding her in a close embrace, the horns of the hunters were heard sounding a deafening flourish.

"We must hurry on, they are calling us," said Jeanne. "Poor Saint-Luc is growing impatient. You must not, by your delays, treat him worse than I intend treating the amorous individual in the cinnamon doublet."

CHAPTER LV.

HOW BUSSY MIGHT HAVE HAD THREE HUNDRED PISTOLES FOR HIS HORSE, AND PARTED WITH HIM FOR NOTHING.

Bussy left Angers long before the earliest-rising citizen had partaken of his morning repast.

He did something more than gallop along the road — he flew.

Diane was standing on one of the terraces of the castle, from which there was a good view of the white pathway that wound its sinuous course through the green meadows.

She beheld a black point shooting toward her like a meteor, and leaving more and more of yonder tortuous ribbon behind it.

She at once ran down the slope, so that Bussy might not have to wait, and that she might have the merit of not having kept him waiting.

The sun had but as yet faintly gleamed over the tops of the giant oaks, the grass was still wet with pearly dewdrops, far away on the mountain echoed the horn of Saint-Luc, sounded at the instigation of Jeanne to remind her friend of the service she was rendering her in leaving her alone.

The joy in Diane's heart was so great and overpowering, she was so intoxicated by her youth, her beauty, and her love, that she felt sometimes during her rapid course as if her soul were soaring aloft with her body and bearing it on wings to the throne of God.

But the distance between the castle and the thicket was long, the young woman's little feet grew weary of treading the

thick grass, and she lost breath several times on the way ; so she only reached the rendezvous just at the moment when Bussy appeared on the crest of the wall and leaped to the bottom.

He saw her running ; she uttered a little joyous shout ; he came to her with open arms ; she hurried to him, pressing both her hands on her heart ; their morning greeting was a long and ardent embrace.

What had they to say ? — they loved each other. What had they to think of ? — they saw each other. What had they to wish for ? — they were seated side by side, holding each other's hand.

The day passed as if it were an hour.

Bussy, as soon as Diane awoke from that entrancing languor which is the sleep of a soul overstrained by happiness, pressed the drooping woman to his breast and said :

“ Diane, it seems to me that only to-day has my life begun, that only to-day have I a clear vision of the path that leads to eternity ; you are the light that has revealed to me this happiness ; I knew nothing before of this world nor of the condition of men in this world ; I can then repeat to you what I said yesterday : with you have I begun to live, with you shall my life end.”

“ And I,” she answered, “ I who once would have flung myself without regret into the arms of death, I tremble to-day at the thought of not living long enough to exhaust all the treasures promised me by your love. But why not come to the castle, Louis ? My father would be happy to see you ; Saint-Lue is your friend, and he is discreet. To have you with me for another hour — think what it must mean to me ! ”

“ Alas, Diane, if I go to the castle for an hour I shall be always there, and all the province will know of my presence ; should the rumor of it reach that ogre, your husband, he would run hither. You have forbidden me to deliver you.”

“ What would be the use ? ” said she, in that tone which is never found but in the voice of the woman we love.

“ Well, well, then, for our safety, — that is to say, for the safety of our happiness, — we must hide our secret from everybody, except Madame de Saint-Lue, who knows it already, — and Saint-Lue, who will have to know it also.”

“ Oh, why ” —

“ Darling, I tell you this because I would hide nothing from

you. I wrote a line to Saint-Luc this morning, requesting an interview at Angers. He will come; he will pledge his honor as a gentleman that never a word of this adventure shall escape his lips. What renders this the more important, my love, is the fact that people must be searching for me now in all quarters. Matters looked very grave when we were leaving Paris."

"You are right — and then, my father is so scrupulous that, though he loves me, he would be quite capable of denouncing me to M. de Monsoreau."

"We must, therefore, be very cautious. Afterward, if God deliver us to our enemies, we can, at least, say we could not have acted otherwise than we have done."

"God is good, Louis; do not doubt of his goodness now."

"I do not doubt of God; but I am afraid of some demon, jealous of our happiness."

"It is time to part, my Louis, and do not gallop so wildly; your horse frightens me."

"Have no fear, he knows the road already, and I have never ridden a gentler and safer steed. While returning to the city, I can indulge freely in the sweet thoughts that fill my mind, for he carries me without imposing on me the necessity of ever touching the reins."

The two lovers exchanged many observations of this nature, interrupted by as many kisses.

At length the music of the hunting-horn grew louder and clearer; the air it played was the one agreed on as a signal between Jeanne and her friend: and Bussy felt it was time to leave.

As he approached Angers, musing on the incidents of this enchanting day and rejoicing in his present freedom from the golden fetter in which his very honors, the management of his large fortune, and the favor of a prince of the blood had held him until now, he noticed that the hour for closing the city gates was nigh. His horse, which had spent the day in browsing on the grass and foliage, had done the same on the road, and night came on without Bussy noticing its coming.

He was on the point of clapping spurs to his steed to make up for lost time, when he heard the galloping of horses behind him.

A lover who wishes to remain concealed sees danger in every direction.

Successful lovers have this peculiarity in common with robbers.

Bussy was uncertain whether he should set his horse to a gallop and try to keep in the lead, or draw up and let the riders pass; but they rode so rapidly that they were behind him in a moment.

There were only two of them.

Bussy, considering that a man like himself, who had often encountered four men successfully, might avoid a conflict with two and not be reproached with cowardice, turned aside; then he noticed that one of the travellers was repeatedly plunging the rowels deep in his horse's flanks, while his companion lashed the poor animal violently.

"Well, yonder is the city," said this companion, speaking with a pronounced Gascon accent; "ply your whip and spurs freely and you may be inside of it soon."

"But the beast is completely out of breath; he shivers and totters; I cannot get him to move," answered the man in front of him. "I would gladly give a hundred horses to be inside my city."

"Some Angevine out late," thought Bussy. "But how stupid fear renders a man! I was afraid I recognized the voice. Ah! the good man's horse is staggering" —

At this moment the two horsemen were alongside Bussy on the road.

"Take care, monsieur," he cried; "get off, get off quick, your horse is going to fall."

Before the words were out of Bussy's mouth the horse fell heavily on his side and stirred a leg convulsively, as if he were ploughing the ground; then suddenly his laborious breathing ceased, his eyes grew dim, he frothed at the mouth and expired.

"Monsieur," said the dismounted cavalier to Bussy, "three hundred pistoles for your horse."

"Good heaven!" cried Bussy, approaching.

"Do you hear me, monsieur? I am in a hurry" —

"Why, my prince, you can have him for nothing," said Bussy, trembling with unutterable emotion; for in the traveller he recognized the Duc d'Anjou.

At the same instant was heard the click of a pistol cocked by the prince's companion.

"Stop!" cried the duke to his truculent defender. "Stop, M. d'Aubigné! Devil take me if it isn't Bussy" —

"Yes, my prince, it is I. But why the devil are you killing horses at such an hour and on such a road?"

"Ah, it is M. de Bussy," said D'Aubigné; "then, monseigneur, you no longer need me. Permit me to return to him who sent me, as the Holy Scripture says."

"Not without receiving my most sincere thanks and the promise of a lasting friendship," said the prince.

"I accept both, monseigneur, and will remind you of them some day."

"M. d'Aubigné — and your highness! — am I standing on my head or on my heels?"

"You were not aware, then, of how things stand at present?" inquired the prince, with an air of distrust and annoyance that did not escape his gentleman's notice. "You did not come here to wait for me, then?"

"Hang it!" thought Bussy, reflecting how equivocal his appearance in Anjou must seem to one so suspicious as François, "I must be cautious! I did better than wait for you," he said aloud, "and, since you wish to enter the city before the closing of the gates, — to horse, monseigneur!"

He offered his steed to the prince, who was busy removing some important papers from between the saddle and saddle-cloth of the dead animal.

"Adieu, then, monseigneur," said D'Aubigné, wheeling round. "M. de Bussy, your servant."

And he galloped off.

Bussy jumped up behind his master and directed the course of the horse to the city, all the time wondering if this black-apparelled prince were not the evil demon which hell, jealous of his happiness, had sent to trouble it.

They entered Angers just as the closing of the gates was being proclaimed by sound of trumpet.

"Where are we to go now, monseigneur?" asked Bussy.

"To the castle. My banner must be hoisted on the walls, my presence made known, and the nobility of the province convoked."

"Nothing more easy," answered Bussy, resolved to acquiesce in everything in order to gain time, and, besides, he was in too dazed a condition to be other than a passive instrument for the moment.

"Stop, gentlemen!" he shouted to the trumpeters, who were returning home after doing their office.

They turned round, but were not at all impressed when they perceived the condition of Bussy and his companion, who were covered with dust and perspiration, and whose dress by no means indicated their rank.

"Ho, there! stop!" cried Bussy, marching up to them — "is it possible the master is not recognized in his own house? — Bring hither the city councillor on duty."

The haughty tone in which Bussy spoke had its effect on the heralds; one of them approached.

"Christ in heaven!" he exclaimed, recoiling in terror, after he had taken a good look at the duke's face — "if it is n't our lord and master!"

The deformity of the prince's nose — split in two, as Chicot's song said — rendered him easily recognizable everywhere.

"Monseigneur le Duc!" he added, seizing the arm of the other herald, who was equally taken aback.

"You know as much as I do myself now," said Bussy, "so don't spare your breath, and let your trumpet sing out loud enough to wake the dead; see to it that the whole city learn in a quarter of an hour of his highness' arrival.

"And now, monseigneur," added the count, turning to the Duc d'Anjou, "the next best thing for us to do is to ride slowly to the castle. I have no doubt we shall find everything ready for your reception when we get there."

The result proved the truth of Bussy's words. At the first cry of the heralds, groups were formed here and there; at the second, old women and children were running through the lanes and streets, screaming:

"Monseigneur is in the city! Welcome to monseigneur! Noel to monseigneur!"

The city councillors, governor, and principal gentlemen hurried to the castle, followed by a crowd that grew denser every moment.

As Bussy had foreseen, the authorities of the city, anxious to receive the prince with due honor, were in the castle before him.

On his way to his residence along the quay, the prince had the greatest difficulty in forcing a passage through the assembled multitude; fortunately, Bussy had found one of the heralds, who, by using his trumpet freely on the heads of the too loyal citizens, forced them to open a path for their master. When the latter reached the steps of the Town Hall he halted and addressed the people.

"Gentlemen and right trusty and leal friends," said he, "I have come to throw myself into my good city of Angers. In Paris the most terrible perils threatened my life; I had even lost my liberty: I succeeded in escaping, thanks to my loyal friends."

Bussy bit his lips: he knew the meaning of the ironical glance François darted at him.

"But now that I am in your city, I feel that my life and my tranquillity are no longer exposed to any danger."

The populace, who expected the largess usually distributed by the prince on such occasions, had shouted vigorously: "Noel! Noel!"

When François entered his palace his first words were: "Let us have supper; I have eaten nothing since morning."

The prince was in a moment surrounded by all the members of the household which, as Duc d'Anjou, he kept up in Angers; only the principal servants were acquainted with their master.

It was next the turn of the gentlemen and ladies of the city.

The reception lasted until midnight.

The city was illuminated, muskets were fired off in the streets and on the squares, the bells of the cathedral were rung, and some whiffs of one of those noisy and enthusiastic celebrations for which the good Angevines have been at all times famous were borne by the wind even to Méridor.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE DUC D'ANJOU'S DIPLOMACY.

WHEN the echo of the musketry in the streets had grown fainter, when the cathedral bells had slackened their vibrations, when the antechambers were cleared of their visitors, when, in short, Bussy and the Duc d'Anjou were alone:

"Let us talk," said the latter.

In fact, François, who was very clear-sighted, had observed that at present Bussy was far more deferential toward him than he was in the habit of being; knowing the count as well as he did, he came to the conclusion that his gentleman must, then, be in an embarrassing situation, and he might, conse-

quently, get the upper hand over him by the exercise of a little adroitness.

But Bussy had had some time for preparation, and was able to look forward to an encounter with his prince tranquilly.

"Let us talk, monseigneur," he answered.

"The last day we saw each other," said the duke, "you were very ill, my poor Bussy!"

"You are right, monseigneur," replied the young man. "I was very ill, and it was almost a miracle that saved me."

"On that day," continued the prince, "you were attended by a certain doctor whose zeal in your service rendered him quite rabid, for, if I remember aright, he snapped furiously at every one who attempted to come near you."

"You are right again, my prince, for Le Haudouin is very much attached to me."

"He insisted rigorously on your staying in bed, did he not?"

"Which drove me nearly frantic, as your highness must have noticed."

"But," said the duke, "if you had been really frantic you would have pitched all the doctors to the devil, and come with me when I asked you."

"Oh — perhaps — I am not quite" — stammered Bussy, twisting his apothecary's hat between his fingers.

"However," went on François, "the affair in which I was concerned might have had serious consequences, and no doubt you were afraid of getting compromised."

"What do you mean?" cried Bussy, immediately donning his hat and slouching it over his eyes; "have I heard aright? Did you say I was afraid of getting compromised?"

"I said so," retorted the prince.

Bussy bounded from his chair and drew himself up to his full height.

"Then you lied, monseigneur!" he cried, "understand me well — you lied to yourself, for you don't believe a word of all you have just said; I have twenty scars on my skin to show I have got compromised sometimes and been afraid never; and, in good faith, I know of plenty who cannot say as much and, above all, cannot show as much."

"You have always conclusive arguments at your fingers' ends, M. de Bussy," answered the duke, pale and agitated. "When you are accused you shout louder than your accuser, and then you fancy you are right."

"Oh, I am not always right, monseigneur," said Bussy, "I know that well, but I also know when I am wrong."

"And when are you wrong, might I ask you?"

"When I serve an ingrate."

"Really, monsieur, I think you forget yourself," said the prince, rising, with that air of dignity which he could very well assume on occasion.

"Oh, very well, monseigneur, I forget myself," retorted Bussy; "do you, for once in your life, do the same; forget yourself, or, at least, forget me."

And the young gentleman moved toward the door; but the prince was quicker than he, and barred his passage.

"Will you deny, monsieur," said the duke, "that on the very day you refused to accompany me you went out the moment I was gone?"

"I never deny anything, monseigneur," answered Bussy, "except what a person tries to force me to acknowledge."

"Tell me then why you were so obstinate in staying in your hotel."

"Because I had business."

"In your hotel?"

"There or elsewhere."

"I used to be under the impression that when a gentleman was in the service of a prince, his principal business was his prince's business."

"And who usually does your business, monseigneur, if not I?"

"I do not assert the contrary: ordinarily I have found you faithful and devoted; nay, I will say more, I think there is some excuse for your ill-temper."

"Ah, you are very kind."

"Yes, you had some reason to be angry with me."

"You admit that, monseigneur?"

"Yes, I had promised you to disgrace M. de Monsoreau. It seems you have a strong detestation for this M. de Monsoreau."

"Oh, not at all. I think he has an awfully ugly face, and I wished him away from court, so that I might not have to look at it. On the other hand, it is a face you are rather fond of. There is no use in disputing about tastes."

"Well, then, if that was your only reason for pouting at me like a spoiled, sulky child, I tell you you were doubly wrong

to refuse to go out with me and to go out afterward for the purpose of making a parade of your useless prowess ? ”

“ Oh, I have made a parade of my useless prowess, have I ? Why, just now, you accused me of — Come, come, monseigneur, it might be as well if we were a little consistent. By the way, what deeds of ‘ useless prowess ’ have I been engaged in ? ”

“ Of course, I can easily understand your hatred of D’Épernon and Schomberg. I hate them myself, and mortally, too. But you ought to have been satisfied with hating them for the time, and wait for the critical moment.”

“ Oh, indeed ! ” said Bussy, “ your words are mysterious, monseigneur ; what do you mean ? ”

“ Kill them, by heavens ! Kill them both, kill the whole four of them, and you will never do anything that will please me better ; but don’t exasperate them, especially when you get away from Paris immediately after, for I become the victim of their exasperation.”

“ To the point, please ; what is it I have done to the worthy Gascon ? ”

“ You speak of D’Épernon, do you not ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Why, you had him pelted with stones.”

“ I ? ”

“ Stoned to such good purpose that his doublet was in tatters, his cloak in rags, and, when he reached the Louvre, he had hardly anything on him except his breeches.”

“ Good ! ” said Bussy, “ we have disposed of one of them. And now let us pass to the German. What injury have I done to M. de Schomberg ? ”

“ Will you deny you had him dyed in indigo ? When I saw him, three hours after his accident, he was still of a bright sky blue. And you call that a fine joke ! Pshaw ! ”

And the prince had to laugh in spite of himself, while Bussy, at the recollection of the figure cut by Schomberg in the vat, fairly roared.

“ So I am supposed, then,” said he, “ to be the person that played these nice tricks on them ? ”

“ *Pardieu !* I suppose you will say it was I ? ”

“ And yet you have the courage, monseigneur, to bring your accusations against a man capable of being the author of such sublime ideas ! I put it to yourself, was I not right just now when I called you an ingrate ? ”

"Agreed, and, if you really left your hotel for that purpose, I pardon you."

"Sure?"

"Yes, upon my word of honor; but I have other grievances against you."

"Fire away."

"I want to say just a little about myself."

"As you like."

"What have you done to get me out of my very unpleasant predicament?"

"You see for yourself what I have done."

"No. I don't see it at all."

"Why, I started at once for Anjou."

"Which means that you ran away, to save yourself."

"Yes, for, by saving myself, I saved you."

"But, instead of going such a distance, don't you think you should have remained near Paris? It seems to me you would have been of more use to me at Montmartre than at Angers."

"Ah, there's where we differ, monseigneur; I preferred to go to Anjou."

"Your preference is hardly a reason. You must admit that this whim of yours" —

"Had for its object to recruit partisans for you."

"Oh, that puts another face on the question. Well, what have you done?"

"Time enough to explain all that to-morrow, monseigneur. I must leave you now."

"Why?"

"I have an appointment with one of the most influential persons in this country."

"Ah, if so, that is another matter: go, Bussy, but be prudent."

"Prudence be hanged! Are we not the strongest party here?"

"For all that, do not run any risks. Have you taken any steps so far?"

"And I only two days here: how could I?"

"At least, you keep yourself concealed, I hope."

"Keep myself concealed! I should think so, *mordieu*! Look at my costume: am I in the habit of wearing cinnamon-colored doublets? For no one in the world but you would I swaddle myself in these frightful duds."

"And where do you lodge?"

"Ah! now, perhaps, you will appreciate my devotion! I lodge — I lodge in a rickety old barracks near the rampart and overlooking the river. But now it's your turn, my prince, to answer questions. How did you get out of the Louvre? How was it I found you on the highway, with a broken-winded horse between your legs, and M. d'Aubigné at your side?"

"Because I have friends," said the prince.

"You — you have friends?" said Bussy. "Oh, that's too good a joke!"

"Yes, friends of whom you know nothing."

"Splendid! — and who are those friends?"

"The King of Navarre and M. d'Aubigné, whom you saw."

"The King of Navarre — Ah, I had forgotten. Did you not conspire together, once upon a time?"

"I have never conspired, M. de Bussy."

"No? You had better inquire of Coconnas and La Mole."

"La Mole," said the prince, darkly, "had committed another crime besides the one for which he was put to death."

"Well, let us leave La Mole and return to yourself, especially as it is a subject upon which we should scarcely agree. How the devil did you get out of the Louvre?"

"Through the window."

"You don't say so! Through which one?"

"A window in my bedroom."

"Why, then, you must have known about the rope-ladder?"

"What rope-ladder?"

"The one in the closet."

"Ah!" exclaimed the prince, turning pale; "so it would seem you knew about it?"

"Why, surely, your highness must be aware I had sometimes had the good fortune to enter that chamber," said Bussy.

"In the time of my sister Margot, was it not? And you were able to enter through the window?"

"By my faith, it seems you were able to go out through it. The thing that puzzles me is how you managed to find the ladder."

"It was not I who found it."

"Who, then?"

"Nobody; I was told where to look for it."

"Who told you?"

"The King of Navarre."

"Ah, indeed! The King of Navarre knew of the ladder?"

I should never have believed it. Well, well, monseigneur, the main point is that you are here, safe and sound, and in the best of health. We'll have Anjou in a blaze in no time, and a spark from that same blaze will set Angoumois and Béarn in a flame; the whole thing will make a rather pretty conflagration."

"But did you not speak of an appointment?" said the duke.

"Ah, *morbleu*! yes; but your conversation is so interesting it made me forget all about it. Adieu, monseigneur."

"Do you take your horse with you?"

"Oh, no; if your highness find him useful, you may keep him. I have another."

"Then I accept; later on we'll regulate our accounts."

"Very well, monseigneur, and God grant that I may not be again your debtor!"

"Why?"

"Because I do not like the man you usually charge with the auditing of your accounts."

"Bussy!"

"I beg your pardon, monseigneur; it was agreed, I know, that we should no longer refer to the past."

The duke, who knew that Bussy was necessary to him, offered him his hand.

Bussy took it in silence, but shaking his head.

Then they separated.

CHAPTER LVII.

SAINT-LUC'S DIPLOMACY.

Bussy returned home on foot in the middle of a foggy night, but, instead of Saint-Luc, whom he had expected, he found only a letter from his friend announcing his arrival on the next day.

Accordingly, at about six the following morning, Saint-Luc, attended by a groom, started from Méridor and took his way to Angers.

He arrived on foot at the ramparts, just as the gates were opening, and, without noticing the strange excitement of the people at such an early hour, he went on to Bussy's lodgings. The two friends embraced cordially.

"Deign, my dear Saint-Luc," said Bussy, "to accept the

hospitality of my humble cabin. I am really camping at Angers."

"Yes," answered Saint-Luc, "after the fashion of conquerors, that is to say, on the field of battle."

"What do you mean, my dear friend?"

"That my wife no more thinks of keeping a secret from me than I think of keeping one from her, and that she has told me all. Pray accept my congratulations; and now, although I freely acknowledge you to be my superior in everything, still, since you have summoned me hither, I am going to take the liberty of giving you a bit of advice."

"Give it, by all means."

"Get rid of that abominable Monsoreau as speedily as you can: no one at court is aware of how you stand with his wife; now is your time, and you must not let the opportunity slip. When you marry the widow, later on, no one will then be able to say you made her a widow to marry her."

"There is only one difficulty in the way of this fine plan, a plan that came into my head as well as yours."

"Ha! So you thought of it, too; but what is the obstacle?"

"I promised Diane to respect the life of her husband — of course, only as long as he did not attack me."

"You were wrong."

"I!"

"Terribly wrong."

"Why?"

"Because nobody ought to make such a promise. Now I am going to tell you something and you may take my word for it it's the truth. If you do not take time by the forelock and make short work of him, this is what will happen: Monsoreau, who is a perfect master in mischief, will find out everything, and, when he does, as he is the very reverse of chivalrous, he will assassinate you."

"That will be as God pleases," said Bussy, smiling: "but, apart from the fact that I should break my promise to Diane if I killed her husband" —

"Her husband! You know well he is no such thing."

"Yes, but that does not hinder him from being known as such. Apart, then, from the fact that I should break my promise to Diane, the whole world would fling stones at me, my dear fellow, and the man whom every one regards as a monster to-day would, as soon as he lay stretched on his bier,

be looked upon as a paragon sent to the tomb by my murderous hand."

"Oh, I did not mean to advise you to kill him yourself."

"Employ assassins! Ah, Saint-Luc, I did not expect such a sinister suggestion from you."

"Nonsense! Who speaks of assassins?"

"Then of what are you speaking?"

"Oh, of nothing, my friend; just an idea that flashed through my mind; it is hardly worth while telling you about it at present. I have as little love for Monsoreau as you have, although I have not the same reason for detesting him — But let us leave the husband and talk of the wife."

Bussy smiled.

"You are a trusty comrade, Saint-Luc, and you may count on my friendship. Now, as you are already aware, my friendship is composed of three things: my purse, my sword, and my life."

"Thanks," answered Saint-Luc, "I accept, but only on condition that I may have my turn also."

"Now, what did you wish to say about Diane?"

"I wished to ask if you are not coming to Méridor for an odd visit now and then."

"My dear friend, I thank you for your warm invitation, but you know my scruples."

"I know everything. At Méridor you fear to meet Monsoreau, although he is at present two hundred and forty miles away from us: you fear to have to shake hands with him, and it is hard to have to shake hands with a man you want to strangle; and, in short, you fear to see him embrace Diane, and it is hard to see the woman you love embraced by another."

"Ah!" cried Bussy, furiously; "how well you understand why I do not go to Méridor! Now, my dear friend" —

"You dismiss me," said Saint-Luc, misunderstanding Bussy's meaning.

"No, on the contrary, I request you to remain, for now it is my turn to ask questions."

"You may do so."

"Surely you must have heard last night the ringing of bells and the firing of musketoons?"

"Yes, and we were wondering what it was all about."

"And did you notice no change when you passed through the city this morning?"

"Quite a ripple of excitement among the people, was there not?"

"Yes."

"I was just going to ask you the cause of it."

"The cause of it was the duke's arrival last night, my dear friend."

Saint-Luc gave a jump that showed he could not have been more surprised if he were told that the devil himself was in Angers.

"The duke in the city! Why, we were told he was imprisoned in the Louvre."

"That is the very reason why he is now in Angers. He managed to escape through a window and has taken shelter here."

"What next?" inquired Saint-Luc.

"What next?" repeated Bussy. "Don't you see, my dear friend, what an excellent opportunity this affords you of getting even with the King for his petty persecutions. The prince has a party already, he will soon have an army, and we'll soon have the train laid for a neat little civil war."

"Oh!" exclaimed Saint-Luc.

"And I reckoned on you and me drawing our swords in company."

"Against the King?" said Saint-Luc, with sudden coldness.

"Not exactly against the King," answered Bussy; "against those who draw the sword against us."

"My dear Bussy," said Saint-Luc, "I came to Anjou for the country air, not to fight against his Majesty."

"But you will allow me to present you to his highness?"

"Useless, my dear fellow; I am not fond of Angers, and I have been thinking of leaving it soon; it is a gloomy, tiresome sort of a place; the stones are as soft as cheeses, and the cheeses are as hard as stones."

"My dear Saint-Luc, you will do me a great service by consenting to yield to my request; the duke asked me what was my business in these quarters, and as I could not very well tell him, since he himself was something like a rejected lover of Diane, I have led him to believe my object in coming here was to gain the gentlemen of the district to his side; I even added that I had an appointment with one of them."

"Well, you can tell him the gentleman kept his appointment and requires six months for consideration."

"I see, my dear Saint-Luc, that you are, at least, as handy at chopping logic, if you will allow me to say so, as I am myself."

"Hear me, Bussy: the only thing I set store by in the world is my wife; the only thing you set store by is your mistress. Now, let us make a bargain: I promise to defend Diane on every occasion; you promise to defend Madame de Saint-Luc on every occasion. A treaty of love, if you like; a political treaty, never. Now you know the basis upon which we may work together."

"I see I must surrender, Saint-Luc," said Bussy, "for, at present, you have the advantage, — I need you, while you can do without me."

"Not at all. It is I, on the contrary, who must solicit your protection."

"Why so?"

"Suppose the Angevines — for I fancy that is the name the rebels will assume — should besiege and sack Méridor?"

"Ah! devil take me but you are right," said Bussy; "you would not care to have its tenants subjected to the consequences of a storming."

The two friends laughed. Then, as the firing of cannon in the city came to their ears, and as Bussy's valet came to inform him that the prince had already inquired for him three times, they swore anew to be faithful to their extra-political alliance, and parted with mutual regard.

Bussy ran to the ducal castle, now thronged with nobles from every part of the province. The news of the duke's arrival had spread like wildfire, and, in towns even ten or twelve miles from Angers, the intelligence had stirred up the people to something like an insurrection.

The count made haste to arrange an official reception, prepare a banquet, and make up speeches for the prince; he was pretty sure to have time to see Diane, at least for a few moments, while François was receiving, eating, and, above all, haranguing. As soon, then, as he had cut out a few hours' work for the prince, he returned to his lodgings, mounted his second horse, and galloped to Méridor.

As for the duke, he delivered some very eloquent discourses: that on the League produced a marvellous effect; he touched discreetly on the points connected with his alliance with the Guises, giving himself out as a prince persecuted by the

King solely because the Parisians had the utmost confidence in him.

While apparently listening to the speeches made in reply to his, and afterward offering his hand to be kissed, he was really taking note of the gentlemen who were present, and especially of those who had not yet arrived.

When Bussy came back to the palace it was four in the afternoon; he jumped off his horse and appeared before the duke, covered with dust and perspiration.

"Aha!" said the duke; "evidently, my brave Bussy, you have been at work."

"You see for yourself, monseigneur."

"You are in a terrible heat."

"I have had an awfully fast ride."

"Take care and don't fall sick: you are not yet entirely recovered, perhaps."

"There's no danger."

"Where have you come from?"

"From places round the city. Is your highness satisfied? Has there been a numerous attendance at your reception?"

"Yes, I am satisfied; but I noticed the absence of a certain individual at my reception, Bussy."

"Who was it?"

"Your protégé."

"My protégé?"

"Yes, the Baron de Méridor."

"Ah!" said Bussy, changing color.

"And yet I must not neglect him, though he neglect me. The baron has great influence in the province."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. He was the correspondent of the League at Angers; he had been selected for this post by M. de Guise, and, as a rule, the Guises choose their men well. He must come, Bussy."

"But if he do not come, monseigneur?"

"If he do not, why, I must make the advances, on my side, and go to him."

"Go to Méridor?"

"Why not?"

Bussy was unable to restrain the jealous and threatening flash that leaped from his eyes.

"In fact, why not?" said he: "you are a prince, and everything is permissible in a prince."

"Ah! I see—you think he is still angry with me?"

"I do not know. How could I?"

"You have not seen him, then?"

"No."

"But if you have been trying to gain over the influential men of the province, you must surely have had something to do with him."

"Undoubtedly I should, if he had not had something to do with me."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I have not been so successful in fulfilling the promise I once made him to be in a great hurry to come into his presence."

"Has he not got what he wanted?"

"How?"

"He wanted the Comte de Monsoreau to marry his daughter, and Monsoreau has married her."

"Well, perhaps, monseigneur, it is as well to drop the subject," and Bussy turned his back on the prince.

At this moment several gentlemen entered who were new arrivals; the duke went to meet them, and Bussy was alone.

The prince's words had set him thinking.

What were the duke's real intentions with regard to the Baron de Méridor?

Were they those expressed by the prince? Was it his sole object to win to his cause the support of an old nobleman who was both powerful and universally respected? Or were his political plans used simply as the means of bringing him nearer to Diane?

Bussy turned over in his mind the prince's present situation: he had quarrelled with his brother, was an exile from the Louvre, the head of an insurrection in the province.

He put in one scale the duke's material interests; in the other his amorous fancies.

The first scale far outweighed the second one.

Bussy was disposed to forgive the duke all the other wrongs he had received at his hands, provided he spared him this one.

He spent the whole night banqueting with his royal highness and the Angevine gentlemen, making his best bows to

the Angevine ladies, and, when the violins were brought in, teaching these same fair ladies the newest dances.

It is needless to say that the women admired him, and their husbands hated him ; and, as some of the latter looked at him in a way Bussy did not like, he twisted his mustache defiantly some half dozen times or so, and politely requested three or four of these gentlemen to step out with him for a walk on the lawn.

But his reputation had preceded him at Angers, and Bussy's offer was respectfully declined.

CHAPTER LVIII.

HOW RÉMY RODE LIKE THE WILD HUNTSMAN AND ANSWERED LIKE THE SOBER SPARTAN.

OUTSIDE the gate of the ducal palace Bussy came upon a frank, faithful, laughing face he had believed to be two hundred and forty miles away.

"Ah!" cried he, joyfully, "so it's you, Rémy!"

"Why, of course it is, monseigneur."

"I was on the point of asking you to join me."

"Really?"

"Upon my honor."

"Why, then, I'm in luck. I was afraid you would scold me."

"And for what, pray?"

"For coming without leave. But, by my faith, as soon as I heard that the Duc d'Anjou had escaped from the Louvre and started for his province, I remembered that you were somewhere in the neighborhood of Angers. Then I said to myself, there was sure to be a civil war, with a good deal of cutting and thrusting on both sides, and a good number of holes bored in my neighbor's hide. So, as you know, as I love my neighbor as myself, and even more than myself, I ran up to have my share of the fun."

"You did well, Rémy; I give you my word I missed you sadly."

"How is Gertrude, monseigneur?"

The count smiled.

"I promise to inquire of Diane the first time I see her," said he.

“ And as one good turn deserves another,” answered Rémy, “ I will ask her, the first time I see her, for news of Madame de Monsoreau.”

“ You are a charming companion ; and how did you manage to find me ? ”

“ Faith, that was not a very difficult task ; I asked where the ducal hotel was and waited for you at the gate, after putting my horse up in one of the prince’s stables, where, God pardon me, I found yours.”

“ Yes, the prince had killed his ; I lent him Roland, and, as he had no other, he kept him.”

“ That’s just like you ! It is you who are the prince, and the prince who is the servant.”

“ Do not exalt me to such a height, Rémy ; you are going to see how your prince is lodged.”

And, after saying this, he introduced Le Handouin into his little house by the rampart.

“ Now you see what the palace is like ; lodge wherever you like, or, rather, wherever you can.”

“ That won’t give me much trouble ; I am not very exacting, as you know. Besides, I am so dead beat at present that I could sleep standing.”

The two friends — for Bussy treated Le Handouin more like a friend than a servant — separated, and Bussy, in higher spirits than ever, now that he had both Diane and Rémy near him, slept the sleep of the just.

The duke, too, must have slept soundly, for in order that he might have a chance of doing so, he requested his friends to stop firing the cannon and muskets ; as for the bells they stopped of their own accord, thanks to the blistered hands of the ringers.

Bussy rose early and ran to the castle, ordering his valet to bid Rémy join him.

His purpose was to observe the face of his highness when he awoke. It is sometimes possible to catch on the features of the yawning and semi-somnolent person who has just been roused from his slumbers a reflection of the thoughts that are in his mind.

The duke was up, but it might have been said of him, as well as of his brother Henri, that he wore a mask while sleeping.

Bussy’s early rising brought him no returns.

He had a whole catalogue of matters, one more important than another, ready for the inspection of the prince.

First, a tour round the walls to examine the fortifications.

Then, a review of the citizens and their arms.

Next, a visit to the arsenal and orders for supplies of all sorts of munitions.

After this, a careful examination of the taxes of the province, to see if it were not possible to induce his highness's leal and trusty vassals to supplement them by a few more little imposts on the common people.

Finally, the correspondence.

But Bussy was perfectly well aware he might not give himself much trouble about the last article; the Duc d'Anjou wrote little; even at that period the proverb "What is written remaineth," was in high favor.

So, armed to meet whatever evil designs might be in the mind of his prince, Bussy watched him as he opened his eyes, but could read nothing in those eyes.

"Ah!" murmured the duke, "you here already!"

"Why, of course, monseigneur, I could not sleep a wink the whole night; the affairs of your highness kept running in my head all the time. And now, what are we going to do this forenoon? Stay—I have it! What if we hunted?"

"Good!" said Bussy to himself, "I thought of that on the spur of the moment; it would give him another occupation."

"Eh!" said the prince, "you say you were thinking of my interests the whole night, and the result of all your wakefulness and meditation is to propose to me that I should hunt? What nonsense!"

"You are right," said Bussy; "besides, we have n't a pack."

"Nor a grand huntsman, either," rejoined the prince.

"Egad, for my part, I should find the chase more pleasant without him."

"Well, I'm not like you; I miss him."

The duke said this in such a singular tone that Bussy noticed it.

"It would seem," he answered, "that that worthy gentleman of whom you are so fond has done nothing for your deliverance any more than myself."

The duke smiled.

"Good," said Bussy to himself; "I know that smile, it is one of his evil smiles; look out for yourself, Monsoreau!"

"You still hate him?" asked the prince.

"Monsoreau?"

"Yes."

"Why should I hate him?"

"Because he is my friend."

"I pity him, on the contrary."

"What does that mean?"

"The higher you raise him, the lower he'll fall when he falls."

"Ah, I see now you are in high spirits."

"I?"

"Yes, that's the way you always talk to me when you are in high spirits — No matter," continued the duke, "I stand by what I said, and Monsoreau would have been very useful to me in this country."

"Why?"

"Because he has property in the neighborhood."

"He?"

"He or his wife."

Bussy bit his lips. The duke was bringing the conversation back to the point from which his follower had so much trouble in diverting him the evening before.

"Ah, you believe that, do you?" he said.

"Undoubtedly. Méridor is about nine or ten miles from Angers. Surely you ought to know that, since it was you that brought the old baron to me."

Bussy saw he must meet this new peril the best way he could.

"Hang it, yes!" said he, "I brought him to you, but why? Because he hung on to my cloak, and unless, like Saint Martin, I left the half of it between his fingers, I had to bring him — At all events, my protection was n't any great help to him."

"Listen," said the duke, "I have an idea."

"The devil you have!" answered Bussy, who had always distrusted his master's ideas.

"Yes, Monsoreau got the better of you once; this time it's you that shall get the better of him."

"What is your meaning, my prince?"

"It's quite simple. You know me, Bussy?"

"I have that misfortune."

"Do you think I am the man to endure an affront and let it pass unpunished?"

"That depends."

The smile of the duke was, if possible, even more baleful than his smile before, while he bit his lips, and shook his head up and down.

"Come, now, monseigneur," said Bussy, "pray explain yourself."

"Well, the grand huntsman stole from me a woman I loved, and made her his wife; now I, in my turn, will steal from him his wife and make her my mistress."

Bussy tried to smile, but all his efforts ended in a grimace.

"Steal M. de Monsoreau's wife!" he stammered.

"Why, nothing, it seems to me, is easier," said the duke. "The woman is now residing on her estate, and you have told me yourself that she detests her husband; I may, then, without any vanity, come to the conclusion that she will prefer me to Monsoreau, especially if I promise — what I shall promise."

"And what will you promise her, monseigneur?"

"To rid her of her husband."

"Ah, then," Bussy was on the point of crying, "why don't you do so at once?"

But he had the courage to control himself.

"You would do so fine a deed as that?"

"You shall see. Meanwhile I will pay a visit to Méridor."

"You would dare?"

"Why not?"

"You would force your way into the presence of the old baron whom you abandoned, after your promise to me —"

"I have an excellent excuse to offer."

"Where the devil are you going to find your excuse?"

"Oh, don't be uneasy. I shall say to him: 'I did not break that marriage, because Monsoreau, who knew that you were one of the principal agents of the League and that I was its chief, threatened to sell us both to the King.'"

"Ah! And is this really an invention of your highness?"

"Not entirely, I must admit," answered the duke.

"Then I understand," said Bussy.

"You understand?" repeated the duke, who was quite mistaken as to the real significance of Bussy's words.

"Yes."

"I shall make him believe that, by allowing Monsoreau to marry his daughter, I saved his life, which was in danger."

"A splendid idea!" said Bussy.

"Isn't it? Oh, by the way, now I think of it, please look out of the window."

"Why?"

"Do as I tell you."

"Very well, I'm looking."

"What kind of weather is it?"

"I am forced to confess to your highness that it is very fine."

"Good. Order out the horses and we'll go and find out how this old foggy Méridor is getting along."

"Immediately, monseigneur."

And Bussy, who for the last quarter of an hour had been acting the part of our embarrassed friend Mascarille, pretended to be going out, went as far as the door, and returned.

"Excuse me, monseigneur. but how many horses did you order?"

"Oh, four or five — as many as you like."

"Then, if you leave the decision of the matter to me, monseigneur," said Bussy, "I shall order out a hundred."

"Oh, a hundred, if you wish," answered the astonished prince: "but what do you want with so many?"

"Because then I can rely on about a quarter of them to do their duty if we are attacked."

The duke started.

"If we are attacked?" he asked.

"Yes," continued Bussy; "I have heard that that district is covered with woods, and it would not be at all strange if we fell into an ambuscade."

"Ah!" exclaimed the duke; "do you think so?"

"Your highness is aware that true courage does not exclude prudence."

The duke was reflecting.

"I'll order out a hundred and fifty," said Bussy, moving a second time toward the door.

"Stop a moment," said the prince.

"What is the matter, monseigneur?"

"Do you believe I am safe in Angers?"

"Well, the city is not strong; but, if well defended" —

"Yes, if well defended; but it may not be well defended. Brave as you are, Bussy, you cannot be in more than one place at the same time."

“Probably not.”

“If I am not safe in the city, — and it is clear I am not, since Bussy has his doubts” —

“I did not say I had any doubts, monseigneur.”

“Oh, yes! of course, I understand you; if I am not safe, I must take prompt measures to secure my safety.”

“Your words are golden, monseigneur.”

“So I will examine the castle, and intrench myself within it.”

“You are right, monseigneur; but see to it that the intrenchments be good ones.”

Bussy stammered; he was afraid, and, until now, fear and he had been strangers; he could not think of anything to say that might help him.

“And then, I have another idea,” said the prince.

“This morning is fruitful, monseigneur,” retorted Bussy.

“I shall bring the Méridors here.”

“Monseigneur, your thoughts exhibit such profundity and wisdom to-day that really — but get up and let us visit the castle.”

The prince summoned his servants, and this gave Bussy an opportunity to slip out for a moment.

He found Le Handouin in one of the apartments. He was the man he wanted to see.

He took him into the duke's cabinet, wrote a few lines, passed into the conservatory, gathered a bunch of roses, rolled the note about the stems, went to the stable, saddled Roland, gave the roses to Rémy, and ordered him to get into the saddle at once. Then, leading him outside the city, as Haman did Mordecai, he turned the horse into a lane.

“Now,” said he, “give Roland free rein; at the end of this lane you will find the forest, in the forest a park, round the park a wall, and at that part of the wall where Roland halts, you will throw over it the bunch of flowers.”

These were the words of the note:

“He whom you expected will not come, because he whom neither of us expected has come, and is more dangerous than ever, for he still loves. Seize with your lips and heart whatever is invisible to your eyes on this paper.”

Rémy obeyed Bussy's directions with regard to Roland, who at once broke into a gallop in the direction of Méridor.

Bussy returned to the ducal palace and found the prince dressed.

As for Rémy, he did his work in half an hour. Borne along like a cloud by the wind, and having the most perfect trust in his master's words, he dashed through meadow and fields and streams and woods, until he came to the bottom of a somewhat damaged wall, whose summit was clothed with ivy and shaded by the branches of tall oaks.

Then Rémy stood up in his stirrups, tied the paper about the stems of the roses more solidly than it had been done before, and, uttering a loud "hem!" flung the bouquet over the wall.

A little cry from the other side of the wall told him the message had arrived safely.

Rémy had nothing further to do there, for he had not been told to wait for a reply.

So he turned the head of the horse in the direction from which he had come, much to the disgust of Roland, who gave practical evidence of his disappointment at being deprived of the feast of acorns he had enjoyed during his previous visits. But Rémy made such a vigorous use of whip and spur that the animal, although not forgetting his wrongs, started into the usual gallop.

Forty minutes later Roland was in his new stable and making up for his disappointment at Méridor by a plenteous repast at a rack filled with hay and a manger overflowing with oats.

Bussy was with the prince, inspecting the castle.

Rémy came up with him at the moment when he was examining a subterranean passage leading to a postern.

"Well!" the count asked his messenger, "what have you seen? what have you heard? what have you done?"

"A wall; a cry; twenty-one miles," answered Rémy, with the brevity of one of those Spartan youths who used to allow their entrails to be devoured by foxes for the greater glory of the laws of Lycurgus.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE FLIGHT OF THE ANGEVINES.

Bussy succeeded so well in interesting the Duc d'Anjou in his warlike preparations that for two whole days his highness had not time either to think of going to Méridor or of bringing the baron to Angers.

Occasionally, however, the duke recurred to the idea of paying his intended visit.

But when he did so, Bussy's activity assumed portentous proportions; he examined the muskets of the entire guard, had the horses put through their exercises, the cannon roaring and the gun-carriages rattling, as if there was question of conquering the fifth part of the world.

When Rémy saw this condition of things, he set about making lint, sharpening his tools, and concocting his salves, as if, in his opinion, there was question of patching up the half of the human race.

The enormous nature of the work going on engrossed the duke's mind wholly for the time.

It is scarcely necessary to say that Bussy, under the pretext of inspecting the outer fortifications, jumped now and then on Roland, and, in less than forty minutes, arrived at a certain wall which he climbed the more easily that, at every previous ascent, he had tipped over a stone or two, so that by this time he had almost made a breach in the enclosure.

As for Roland, he did not require any one to tell him where he was going. All Bussy had to do was to drop the reins and shut his eyes.

"Well, I have gained two days," thought Bussy; "the very devil 's in it if the next two don't bring me a little good luck."

Bussy was not quite wrong in counting on his luck.

Toward the evening of the third day, as an enormous convoy of provisions was entering the city, the result of an assessment levied by the duke on his leal and trusty Angevines, and just as M. d'Anjou, to show what an amiable prince they had, was munching the black bread of his soldiers and soiling his beautiful teeth with their salt herrings and dried cod, toward the evening of the third day, we repeat, a terrible uproar was heard at the gates of the city.

M. d'Anjou inquired the cause of this uproar, but nobody could tell him.

At the spot from which the noise proceeded, there was quite a commotion, and the handles of halberds and butt ends of muskets were plied freely, some of the good citizens, attracted thither by curiosity, coming in for their share of the blows.

This was the cause of the excitement.

A man, mounted on a white horse streaming with perspiration, had appeared at the barrier of the *Porte de Paris*.

Now Bussy, as a result of his system of browbeating, had compelled his prince to appoint him captain-general of Anjou and grand master of the fortresses. He had established the severest discipline everywhere, but especially in Angers; no one could leave or enter the city unless he knew the watchword.

The real object of all this strict discipline was to prevent the duke from sending any person to Diane without his knowledge, and to make sure that, if Diane entered the city, he should be the first to learn of her arrival.

Bussy's conduct may, perhaps, appear a little extravagant; but fifty years later Buckingham committed follies quite as extravagant for the sake of Anne of Austria.

The man on the white horse had, then, as we have said already, arrived at a furious gallop and ridden straight up to the post.

But the captain of the post had his orders.

These orders had been transmitted to the sentry, who barred the way with his partisan; as the cavalier had shown but little respect for the action of the sentry, the latter had cried:

"To arms!"

Thereupon the post had turned out and its captain had demanded an explanation.

"I am Antragnet," said the cavalier, "and I wish to speak with the Duc d'Anjou."

"We are not acquainted with any Antragnet," the captain had answered; "but your wish to speak shall be gratified, for we are going to arrest you and bring you before his highness."

"Arrest me!" the cavalier had cried; "you must be a saucy knave to think of arresting Charles de Balzac d'Entragues, Baron de Cuneo and Comte de Graville."

"But it's the very thing we are going to do," said the worthy citizen, adjusting his gorget, and feeling that he had a score of men behind him and only one before him.

"Wait a moment, my good friends," said Antraguët. "You don't know the Parisians yet, do you? Well I am going to show you a sample of what they can do."

"Arrest him! Bring him before monseigneur!" cried the furious citizen-soldiers.

"Softly, my little Angevine lambs," said Antraguët. "I am going to have the pleasure of showing you something."

"What 's that he says?" cried several voices.

"He says his horse has only travelled thirty miles and will ride over you all if you don't step aside. Step aside, then, or *ventre-bleuf!*" —

And as the good tradesmen of Angers had evidently had but slight acquaintance with Parisian oaths, Antraguët had drawn his sword and, with one stupendous sweep, had cut off the blades of the nearest halberds, whose points were presented at him; in less than ten minutes, fifteen or twenty halberds were changed into broom-handles.

The enraged citizens aimed their blows at the newcomer, who parried them with prodigious dexterity, now in front, now behind, now on the right hand, now on the left, laughing boisterously all the time.

"Ah! what a glorious entry I'm making!" said he, almost convulsed, "what polite creatures are the townsfolk of Angers! *Morbleu*, what an entertainment they have provided for me! It was a lucky thought of the prince to come here, and of myself to follow him!"

And Antraguët not only kept on parrying, but, now and then, when he was too closely pressed, he cut through the hat of one, the sallet of another, occasionally stunning with the flat of his sword some imprudent warrior who rushed into the thick of the fight with no better protection for his head than his simple cap of Angevine wool.

The maddened townsfolk fought on, maiming one another in their zeal to get in a stroke, and when beaten back, returning to the charge; like the soldiers of Cadmus, it might have been said of them that they sprang from the ground.

Antraguët was beginning to feel that he could not stand it much longer.

"Come, now," said he, when he saw that the ranks of his enemies were growing thicker; "we have had enough of this. You are as brave as lions, and I am ready to bear testimony to the fact. But you see you have nothing left but the handles of

your halberds and you don't know how to load your muskets. I was determined on entering the city, but I was not aware it was defended by an army of Cæsars. I renounce the task of trying to conquer you. Good day, adieu, I am leaving you: but tell the prince I came from Paris expressly to see him."

Meanwhile the captain had succeeded in lighting the match of his musket, but just as he was about to take aim, Antragnet struck him so violently on the fingers with his flexible cane that he dropped the weapon and began hopping alternately on his right foot and his left.

"Kill him! Kill him!" cried the bruised and furious warriors, "don't let him get away! Don't let him escape!"

"Oh, indeed!" cried Antragnet, "you wouldn't let me in a few minutes ago, and now you won't let me out. Then take care of yourselves! You force me to change my tactics and use the point of my sword instead of the flat; now it's wrists that I'll have to cut off, not halberd blades. Come, now, my lambs of Anjou, won't you let me leave you?"

"No, kill him! Kill! He's tired out! Knock him off his horse!"

"Very well; so the game is to be played in good earnest, is it?"

"Yes! yes!"

"Then look out for your fingers, for you'll soon be without hands!"

Scarcely had he finished and made ready to put his threat into execution, when another cavalier appeared above the horizon, galloped to the barrier at the same frantic pace, and fell like a thunderbolt among the combatants, now engaged in a real conflict.

"Antragnet!" cried the stranger, "Antragnet, I say! What the devil are you doing in the midst of these townspeople?"

"Livarot!" cried Antragnet, turning round, "ah, *mordieu!* you come in the nick of time; *Montjoie et Saint-Denis*, to the rescue!"

"I knew well I should overtake you: I heard, four hours ago, that you had gone before me, and I have been following you ever since. But how the devil did you get mixed up with this rabble? Do they want to massacre you?"

"Yes; these are our Angevine friends, if you please, and they will neither let me come in nor go out."

"Gentlemen," said Livarot, taking off his hat, "be so kind as to step aside and let us pass."

"They are insulting us," cried the townsfolk. "Kill them! Kill them both!"

"Ah, these are the sort of people that live in Angers," said Livarot, putting his hat on his head with one hand, and drawing his sword with the other.

"You see what they are," answered Antraguët. "Unluckily, there are so many of them."

"Bah! we three will soon make short work of them."

"We might if we were three; but we are only two."

"Ribeirac is behind us."

"He, too?"

"Do you not hear him?"

"I see him. Hollo, Ribeirac! Hollo! Come here!"

In fact, at that very moment Ribeirac was making the same headlong dash into the city of Angers that his companions had made before him.

"Oho! so there's a fight on hand! That's what I call a godsend! Good day, Antraguët; good day, Livarot."

"Let us charge them," answered Antraguët.

The citizen soldiers stared in bewilderment at this new auxiliary of their two opponents, who were now about to pass from the condition of the assailed to that of assailants.

"Merely on us!" said the captain, "there must be a regiment of them!" Then to his soldiers: "Gentlemen, our order of battle is evidently faulty, and I propose that we wheel to the left."

The worthy tradesmen, with the skill that ordinarily characterizes the military movements of their class, at once began to wheel to the right.

Moreover, apart from the suggestion to act prudently contained in the invitation of their captain, the martial air of the three cavaliers in front of them was calculated to confuse the most intrepid.

"It is their vanguard!" cried such of the citizens as wished to have an excuse for running away. "The enemy! The enemy!"

"Fire!" shouted others, "fire! fire!"

"We are fathers of families, and our lives belong to our wives and children. Fly!" exclaimed the captain.

The natural result of these cries, all springing from the same

cause and having the same object, was, as we have seen, a frightful tumult in the streets, and many of the crowd that ran out of doors to discover what was the matter were beaten black and blue by the warriors, who, in their terror, were making the most violent efforts to force a passage through their inquisitive fellow-townsmen.

It was at this moment that the noise of the uproar reached the castle, where, as we have said, the Duc d'Anjou was sampling the black bread, sour herrings, and dried cod of his partisans.

Bussy and the prince made inquiries; they were told that the entire disturbance was created by three demons in human guise from Paris.

"Three men!" said the prince; "go and see who they are, Bussy."

"Three men!" repeated Bussy; "come along with me, monseigneur."

And the two started, Bussy in front, the prince prudently following him, and accompanied by a score of horsemen.

They arrived just as the citizen soldiers were about to execute the manœuvre of which we have spoken, to the great detriment of the skulls and shoulders of the curious.

Bussy stood up in his stirrups, and his eagle eye soon recognized the long face of Livarot.

"*Mort de ma vie!* Come on, monseigneur; it is our friends of Paris who are besieging us."

"No!" answered Livarot, in a voice of thunder; "it is, on the contrary, your friends of Anjou who are having a fling at us."

"Down with your weapons!" cried the duke; "down with your weapons, knaves; these are friends."

"Friends!" cried the ill-treated, bruised, and wounded warriors. "Friends! Then why has not the watchword been given to them? For a full hour we have been treating them like pagans, and they have been treating us like Turks."

And the retreat of the citizen soldiers was now accomplished in regular order.

Livarot, Antraguët, and Ribeirac marched triumphantly into the space left vacant by the retreat of their antagonists, and hurried eagerly to kiss the hand of his highness; after which, each in his turn embraced Bussy.

"Monseigneur," whispered the latter in his master's ear, "count the number of your soldiers present."

"For what purpose?"

"Oh, no matter. I don't want you to count them one by one, but try and guess at the number."

"I suppose there might be a hundred and fifty, at least."

"At least — yes."

"Well, what do you mean?"

"I mean that they must be a rather strange sort of soldiers, since three men beat them."

"Quite true," said the duke. "What follows?"

"What follows? You wouldn't think of venturing out of the city with such a rabble-rout as that!"

"Yes," answered the duke, "for I'll make sure to take with me the three men who have beaten them."

"Ugh!" murmured Bussy to himself. "I had never thought of that. Your dastard is your only true logician."

CHAPTER LX.

ROLAND.

THANKS to the arrival of these three partisans, the Duc d'Anjou was enabled to make investigations in every quarter outside the walls of his city.

Accompanied by the friends who had arrived at such an opportune moment, he moved about surrounded by all the pomp of war, to the immense pride of the honest citizens, although a comparison between the well-mounted, well-equipped gentlemen in his train and the urban militia, with its splintered and rusty armor, would hardly redound to the advantage of the latter.

First he reconnoitred the ramparts; then the gardens bordering on the ramparts; then the country bordering on the gardens; lastly the castles scattered over this country. And he expressed his contempt, in his most arrogant manner, for the woods that had lately been such objects of terror to him, or, rather, which Bussy had rendered such objects of terror to him.

The Angevine gentlemen who had arrived had plenty of money.

They enjoyed at the court of the Duc d'Anjou a freedom they were far from experiencing at the court of Henri III.;

they could not fail, therefore, to lead a joyous life in a city which was disposed — as is, indeed, the duty of every capital that respects itself to do — to rifle the purses of its guests.

Before three days had slipped by Antragnet, Ribeirac, and Livarot had become intimate with such of the Angevine nobles as had a partiality for the modes and fashions of Paris.

It is hardly necessary to state that these worthy lords were married and had young and pretty wives.

So it was not for his own individual pleasure, as might have been supposed by those acquainted with the selfishness of the Duc d'Anjou, that he created the splendid pageants and cavalcades that became now common in the city. Oh, no.

These processions were a source of pleasure to the Parisian gentlemen who had joined him, to the Angevine nobles, and, above all, to the Angevine ladies.

God must have taken especial delight in them, for the cause of the League was also God's cause.

On the other hand, they must have, undoubtedly, exasperated the King.

But what matter? The ladies were delighted.

So the great Trinity of the period was duly represented: God, the King, and the ladies.

The general joy was at its height when twenty-two riding-horses, thirty carriage-horses, and forty mules, with litters, carriages, and wagons, were seen to enter Angers, all for the special service of his highness the Duc d'Anjou.

The entire equipment had been purchased at Tours for the trifling sum of fifty thousand crowns, which the duke had laid aside for this purpose.

We must admit that, though the horses were saddled, the saddles were not paid for; we must also admit that, though the coffers had magnificent locks, and had been locked with great care, the coffers were empty.

It is but fair to point out, however, that the last circumstance was greatly to the prince's credit, since he might have filled them by the employment of extortionate measures.

Still, it was not in his nature to take things openly; he preferred to purloin them.

Nevertheless, the entrance of this long train produced a magnificent effect in Angers.

The horses were sent to the stables, the carriages to the coach-houses.

The coffers were carried by the prince's most trusty confidants.

It would have been worse than madness to confide to unsafe hands the sums they did not contain.

At length, the palace gates were shut in the face of an excited multitude, convinced by this far-seeing plan that the prince had just brought two millions into the city, while, on the contrary, the empty coffers, if they could speak, would say that they expected to leave the city with something like that amount.

The Duc d'Anjou's reputation for opulence was, from that day forward, solidly established; and the whole province was positive, after the spectacle it had witnessed, that he was rich enough to make war on all Europe, if he chose.

This confidence was a great help to the citizens in enabling them to bear patiently the new taxes which, by the advice of his friends, the prince had decided to levy on the Angevines.

We never regret the money we lend or give to the rich.

The King of Navarre, with his reputation for poverty, would never have obtained a quarter of the success which the Duc d'Anjou obtained through his reputation for wealth.

But let us return to our duke.

The excellent prince was living like a patriarch; in fact, living on the fat of the land, and every one knows Anjou is a fat country.

The highways were covered with horsemen galloping to Angers to make their submission to the prince or offer him their services.

M. d'Anjou, on his side, did not conceal the fact that all his explorations had in view the finding of some treasure or other.

So Bussy took good care that none of these explorations should be pushed as far as the castle inhabited by Diane.

There was a treasure there that Bussy reserved for himself alone, a treasure which, after defending itself in due form, had at last surrendered at discretion.

Now, while M. d'Anjou was exploring in hopes of finding a treasure, and while Bussy was guarding his, M. de Monsoreau, mounted on his hunter, was drawing nigh the gates of Angers.

It was about four in the afternoon, and, to arrive at that hour, M. de Monsoreau had ridden fifty-four miles.

So, his spurs were red; and his horse, white with foam, was half dead.

Those who came to the city gates now had no difficulty in passing through; in fact, the worthy burghers had grown so proud and scornful that they would have let in a battalion of Swiss without making the slightest objection, though these Swiss were commanded by the brave Crillon himself.

M. de Monsoreau, who was not a Crillon, rode straight through, merely saying:

"I am going to the palace of his highness the Duc d'Anjou."

He did not wait for the answer of the guards who shouted their answer after him.

His horse kept on his legs, the marvellous equilibrium of the animal being apparently due to the speed at which he was travelling. The poor beast held his ground, but it looked as if he should fall as soon as he came to a stop. He halted at the palace; M. de Monsoreau was a splendid equestrian, his steed was a thoroughbred; both horse and rider remained standing.

"M. le Duc!" cried the grand huntsman.

"His highness has gone with a reconnoitring party," answered the sentry.

"Where?" asked M. de Monsoreau.

"In that direction," said the sentry, pointing to one of the four cardinal points.

"The devil!" said Monsoreau, "what I had to say to the prince cannot be delayed. What am I to do?"

"Put your horse in the stable," was the answer, "for, if you don't prop him against a wall, he'll drop."

"Your advice is prudent. Where are the stables, my good fellow?"

"Down below, monsieur."

At this moment a man approached the gentleman and gave him his name and rank.

It was the major-domo.

M. de Monsoreau, in turn, told his name, surname, and rank.

The major-domo bowed respectfully; the grand huntsman's name was well known in Anjou.

"Monsieur," said he, "have the goodness to enter and take some repose. His highness went out about ten minutes ago, and will not be back before eight to-night."

"Eight to-night," rejoined M. de Monsoreau, biting his mustache. "I should have to lose too much time. I am the bearer of

important intelligence which the prince must know at once. Can you furnish me with a horse and guide ? ”

“ A horse ! you can have ten, monsieur,” said the major-domo ; “ but as for a guide, it is a different matter. Monseigneur has not told any one where he is going, so a guide could do nothing for you ; besides, I should not care to lessen the number of soldiers in the garrison. I have been specially charged by his highness not to do so.”

“ Ah ! ” exclaimed the grand huntsman, “ so you are not safe here ? ”

“ Oh, monsieur, there is always safety in the company of such men as Messieurs Bussy, Livarot, Ribeirac, and Antragnet, without counting our invincible prince, his highness the Duc d’Anjou ; but you understand ” —

“ Yes, I understand that, when they are absent, there is less security.”

“ Undoubtedly, monsieur.”

“ Then I shall take a fresh horse from the stable and try to come up with his highness by making inquiries.”

“ There is reason for hoping that, by doing so, you may come on the track of his highness.”

“ Did the cavalcade gallop when it started ? ”

“ No, it went slowly.”

“ Very well, that settles it ; show me the horse I am to take.”

“ Go into the stable, monsieur, and choose for yourself ; they all belong to his highness.”

“ Very well.”

Monsoreau entered the stable.

Ten or twelve of the finest and freshest horses were feeding at mangers filled with the most palatable grain and provender to be found in Anjou.

“ There they are,” said the major-domo, “ you can choose.”

Monsoreau looked at the animals with the eye of a connoisseur.

“ I ’ll take that brown bay,” said he ; “ have him saddled.”

“ Roland ? ” asked the major-domo.

“ He is called Roland, then ? ”

“ Yes, he is the favorite horse of his highness, who rides him every day ; he was given to him by M. de Bussy, and, certainly, you would not have found him in the stable to-day only that his highness wished to try some new horses he has received from Tours.”

"Well, you see I am not a very bad judge."

A groom approached.

"Saddle Roland," said the major-domo.

As to Monsoreau's own steed, he had entered the stable of his own accord and lain down on the litter without waiting until his harness was taken off.

Roland was saddled in a few seconds.

Monsoreau leaped lightly on his back and inquired a second time in what direction the cavalcade had started.

"It started through that gate and followed yonder street," answered the major-domo, pointing in the direction already indicated by the sentry.

"Upon my word," said Monsoreau, on perceiving that, when he slackened the reins, the horse took that very road, "Roland acts as if he were following the scent."

"Oh, do not be uneasy," said the major-domo. "I heard M. de Bussy and his physician, M. Rémy, say that Roland is the most intelligent animal in existence. As soon as he catches the odor of his comrades, he will join them; see what beautiful legs he has — a stag might envy them."

Monsoreau leaned over to look at them.

"Magnificent," said he.

In fact, the animal started off without waiting for whip or spur, and passed deliberately out of the city; he even took a short cut, before reaching the gate, at a point where the road was bifurcated, the path to the left being circular, that to the right straight, and thus abridged the distance.

While giving this proof of his intelligence, the horse shook his head as if to escape from the bridle which weighed on his lips; he seemed to be saying to his rider that compulsion was entirely unnecessary, and, the nearer he approached the city gate, the more rapid was his pace.

"Really," murmured Monsoreau, "he deserves all the praise he has received; very well, as you know your way so perfectly, go on, Roland, go on."

And he dropped the reins on the horse's neck.

When Roland reached the outer boulevard he hesitated a moment to consider whether he should turn to the right or left.

He turned to the left.

A peasant was just then passing.

"Have you seen a company of horsemen, my friend?" asked Monsoreau.

"Yes, monsieur," answered the rustie. "I met them yonder, in front of you."

The peasant pointed exactly in the direction which Roland had taken.

"Go on, Roland, go on," said the grand huntsman, slackening the reins of his steed, who broke into a trot that, if continued for an hour, would carry him ten or twelve miles.

The horse, after following the boulevard for some time, suddenly wheeled to the right and entered a flowery lane, which cut across the country.

Monsoreau was in doubt whether he should stop Roland or not, but the animal appeared to know his business so thoroughly that he decided not to interfere with him.

According as the horse advanced, he grew more and more lively, passed from a trot to a gallop, and, in less than a quarter of an hour, the city had vanished from the eyes of his rider.

Monsoreau, too, seemed to recognize the localities, the farther he advanced.

"Why," said he, on entering a wood, "it looks as if one were going to Méridor. Can his highness have ridden in the direction of the castle?"

And his face grew black at the thought which had now entered his mind for the first time.

"Ah!" he murmured, "I who came first to see the prince, and put off my visit to my wife till to-morrow! What if I should have the happiness to see them both at the same time?"

A terrible smile passed over the lips of the grand huntsman.

The horse never slackened his pace, always keeping to the right with a tenacity that showed how perfectly he knew the direction in which he was going.

"Why, upon my soul," thought Monsoreau, "I am sure now that I cannot be very far from the park of Méridor."

At this moment the horse began to neigh.

There was immediately a responsive neigh from the depth of the foliage.

"Ah," said the grand huntsman to himself, "apparently Roland has found his comrade."

The horse now went with double speed, passing like a flash under the tall trees.

Suddenly Monsoreau saw a wall and a horse fastened near the wall.

This horse neighed, and Monsoreau knew it was the same horse that had neighed before.

"There is some one here!" said he, turning pale.

CHAPTER LXI.

WHAT M. DE MONSOREAU CAME TO ANNOUNCE.

THERE was a renewal of M. de Monsoreau's amazement at every turn; the wall of Méridor, suddenly revealed to him as it were by enchantment, and yonder horse's acquaintance and friendliness with the horse he rode, were circumstances certainly calculated to raise suspicions in the most sceptical soul.

When he approached — and it may be easily guessed that his approach was not slow — he noticed the dilapidated state of the wall at this particular spot; it was not unlike a ladder, and threatened soon to become a breach; steps had apparently been hollowed out for the feet, and twigs that had been caught at and half torn away were hanging from the injured branches.

The count embraced the whole condition of things at a glance; then he examined into details.

The indiscreet animal's saddle was furnished with a saddle-cloth embroidered in silver.

In one of the corners was a double FF interlacing a double AA.

Beyond a doubt, the horse came from the prince's stables, for the cipher was that of François d'Anjou.

At this sight the suspicion of the count changed to consternation.

The duke, then, had come to this part of the wall; he had come often, since, beside the horse tied yonder, there was another horse that knew the way.

Monsoreau arrived at the conclusion that as he was now on the track, he must follow this track to the bitter end.

The experience gained by the grand huntsman would be useful to the jealous husband.

But as long as he remained on this side of the wall it was

evident he could see nothing. So he tied up his horse near to the other, and bravely began the ascent.

It was easy enough, one foot seemed calling to the other; there were places for the hands to rest on; the curve of an arm was outlined on the stones on the surface of the summit, and a hunting-knife had carefully lopped off the branches of an oak that had interfered with the view and embarrassed the movements of the climber, whose efforts had been crowned with entire success.

M. de Monsoreau was no sooner settled in his place of observation than he perceived a blue mantilla and a black velvet cloak lying at the foot of a tree.

The mantilla undoubtedly belonged to a woman, and the black cloak to a man: moreover, he had not to search far for the owners; a man and a woman were walking arm in arm about fifty paces from where he stood, with their backs turned to the wall, and hidden also by the foliage of the bush.

Unluckily for M. de Monsoreau, he had not accustomed the wall to his movements, and a big stone, loosened from the coping, fell down, breaking the branches on the grass and making a loud noise.

Hearing the crash, the persons hidden from M. de Monsoreau by the bush apparently turned round and saw him, for a woman's significant cry was heard; then the rustling of the foliage told the count that they were running away like startled deer.

At the cry of the woman, drops of anguish stood on Monsoreau's forehead. He had recognized Diane's voice. Incapable of resisting the furious impulse that hurried him on, he leaped down, and, sword in hand, sought to cut his way through the bushes and branches.

But they had vanished, nothing troubled the silence of the park; not a shadow in the depths of the avenues, not a trace on the paths, not a sound in the thickets, save the warbling of the nightingales and finches, which, accustomed to the sight of the lovers, were no longer alarmed by their presence.

What could he do in the midst of such a solitude? What should be his resolve? In what direction should he run? The park was immense; he might, during his pursuit of those he sought, meet those he was not seeking.

M. de Monsoreau decided that the discovery he had made was sufficient for the moment; besides, he felt that he was too

violently excited to act with the prudence indispensably needed to be successful against a rival so formidable as François; for he no longer doubted that the prince was his rival.

Then, whether it was he or not, he had to fulfil an urgent mission to the Duc d'Anjou; when he was face to face with the prince, he would know what to think of his guilt or of his innocence.

And now a sublime idea flashed through his mind.

It was to cross the wall again at the spot where he had climbed it, and carry off the horse of the intruder he had surprised in the park along with his own.

This vengeful design gave him renewed strength; he turned and ran back to the wall, where he arrived gasping and covered with perspiration.

Then, aided by the branches, he reached the top and jumped on the other side; but on the other side there was no horse or, rather, there were no horses.

His idea was so excellent that, before coming to him, it had come to his enemy, and his enemy had anticipated him.

M. de Monsoreau, completely crushed, uttered a howl of rage, shaking his clenched hand at the demon who must now be laughing at him in some dark recess of the wood; but his was a will not easily vanquished; he determined to withstand the fatal influences that seemed bent on successively overwhelming him; that very instant even, he set about finding his way back to Angers; in spite of the night that was rapidly falling, he summoned up all his strength and, following a cross-road which he knew from childhood, he again entered the city.

When, after a walk of two hours and a half, he had arrived at the city gate, he was almost half-dead from thirst, heat, and weariness; but his excitement and fury furnished him with renewed strength, and he was soon the same man he had ever been, at once violent and resolute.

Moreover he derived support from a certain thought that had entered his mind: he would question the sentry, or rather every sentry; he would go from gate to gate; he would know by which of the gates a man had entered with two horses; he would empty his purse, would make golden promises, and would have a description of this man.

Then, no matter who this man might be, he should pay him his debt, sooner or later.

He questioned the sentry; the sentry had only just been placed on duty and knew nothing; he entered the guard-house, and made inquiries there.

The soldier who had been last on guard said that about two hours before a horse without a rider had passed through the gate and had taken the road to the palace.

He had then thought some accident must have happened to his rider, and that the intelligent animal had returned to his stable of his own accord.

Monsoreau struck his forehead: it was fated that he should discover nothing.

Then he directed his steps to the ducal palace.

In the palace was great animation, great noise, and much joyous excitement; the windows shone like suns, and the kitchens gleamed like glowing ovens, sending forth odors enticing enough to make the stomach forget that it is the neighbor of the heart.

However, the wickets were closed, and there might be a difficulty in having them opened; but have them opened he must.

He called the concierge and gave him his name; the concierge refused to recognize him.

"You were erect," said he, "and now you are bent."

"From fatigue."

"You were pale and now you are red."

"From the heat."

"You were on horseback and now you are on foot."

"Because my horse took fright, bolted, threw me, and returned without a rider."

"Ah, that is as may be," said the concierge.

"At all events, go and call the major-domo."

The concierge, delighted at seeing his way to a means of avoiding all responsibility, sent for M. Rémy, who at once recognized Monsoreau.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "where have you come from that you are in such a condition?"

Monsoreau repeated the same invention he had retailed to the concierge.

"In fact," said the major-domo, "we were very anxious when we saw the horse returning without a rider — especially monseigneur, to whom I had the honor of announcing your arrival."

"Ah! monseigneur seemed anxious?" inquired Monsoreau.

"Very anxious, indeed."

"What did he say?"

"That you must be shown in immediately on your arrival."

"Very well: I will take time only to visit the stable and see if anything has happened to his highness's horse."

Monsoreau passed into the stable and found the intelligent animal in the stall he had taken him from; he was feeding like a horse that felt he must recruit his strength.

Then, without seeking to change his dress, for Monsoreau believed the importance of the news he was bringing dispensed him from observing the rules of etiquette, the grand huntsman directed his steps to the dining-room. All the prince's gentlemen, and his highness as well, gathered around a table magnificently served and lighted, were attacking the pheasant pies, broiled boar-steaks, and spiced side-dishes which they watered with the dark-colored wine of Cohors, so generous and velvety, or with the sparkling beverage of Anjou, so sweet and at the same time so treacherous that its fumes set the brain on fire before the last topaz-like drops in the glass are quaffed.

"The court is now completely full," said Antragnet, as rosy-cheeked as a young girl, and already as drunk as an old reiter, "as completely full as your highness's cellar."

"No, no," answered Ribeirac, "not so; we have no grand huntsman. It is, in truth, a shame that we should be eating your highness's dinner, and that we should have furnished no part of it ourselves."

"I vote we have some grand huntsman or other," said Livarot, "I don't care whom, even if it be M. de Monsoreau."

The duke smiled. He was the only one who knew of the count's arrival.

Livarot had hardly finished speaking and the prince smiling, when the door opened and M. de Monsoreau entered.

The duke, as soon as he perceived him, uttered an exclamation that was the more noticeable because a general silence had been the result of the grand huntsman's appearance.

"Well, here he is," said he; "you see we are specially favored by Heaven, gentlemen, since it has at once sent us what we asked for."

Monsoreau, rather put out by the prince's coolness,—a coolness not usual with him in such cases,—saluted, in an embarrassed way, and turned aside his head, as if he had been an owl suddenly transported from darkness into sunlight.

"Sit down and have your supper," said the duke, pointing to a seat in front of him.

"Monseigneur," answered Monsoreau, "I am very hungry, thirsty, and tired, but I will neither eat nor drink nor sit down until I have communicated to your highness a message of the highest importance."

"You come from Paris, do you not?"

"Yes, in great haste, monseigneur."

"Well, you may speak," said the duke.

Monsoreau approached François, with a smile on his lips and hate in his heart, and said, in a low tone:

"Monseigneur, the queen mother is advancing by long stages to pay a visit to your highness."

The duke, upon whom every eye was riveted, could not help looking delighted.

"It is well," he whispered, "thanks;" then, aloud: "I find you, M. de Monsoreau, to-day as always, a faithful servant. Let us go on with our supper, gentlemen."

And he drew his chair, which he had pushed back for a moment to hear M. de Monsoreau, to the table again.

The gayety of the banquet was restored; but the grand huntsman, who sat between Livarot and Ribeirac, as soon as he had the satisfaction of sitting in a comfortable chair, before a bounteous repast, suddenly lost all appetite.

The spirit resumed its sway over the flesh.

His mind, engrossed by sad thoughts, returned to the park of Méridor, and, making the same journey his exhausted body had just accomplished, again, like some watchful palmer, wandered along the flowery path that had conducted him to the wall.

He saw again the horse that neighed; he saw again the broken wall; he saw again the fleeing lovers; he heard again Diane's cry, the cry that echoed in his heart's recesses.

Then, indifferent to the noise and light and banquet, forgetful of the men beside him, forgetful of the man in front of him, he plunged into his own thoughts until his brow grew clouded and, unconsciously, he uttered a hollow groan, which at once drew to him the attention of the astonished guests.

"You are thoroughly tired out, M. le Comte," said the prince; "I think you had better go to bed."

"Faith, yes," said Livarot, "the advice is good, and, if you do not take it, you are pretty sure to fall asleep in your chair."

"Excuse me, monseigneur," answered Monsoreau, "but I am exceedingly fatigued."

"Get drunk, count," said Antraguët; "nothing brightens a fellow up like that."

"And then," murmured Monsoreau, "when you are drunk, you forget."

"Pshaw!" said Livarot; "you must be out of your senses. Look, gentlemen, he has not touched his glass!"

"Your health, count," said Ribeirac, raising his.

Monsoreau was forced to honor the gentleman's toast, and he drank off the contents of his glass without removing it from his lips.

"Why, he can drink like a Trojan," cried Antraguët. "Look, monseigneur."

"Yes," answered the prince, who was trying to read the count's heart. "Yes, he does it very well."

"You must get up a good hunt for us, count; you know the country," said Ribeirac.

"You have horses, hounds, and woods," added Livarot.

"And even a wife," continued Antraguët.

"Yes," repeated Monsoreau, mechanically, "horses, hounds, woods, and even Madame de Monsoreau. Yes, gentlemen, yes."

"Could you start a boar for us, count, do you think?" said the prince.

"I will try, monseigneur."

"Ah, upon my word, that 'I will try' is a nice kind of answer," said one of the Angevine gentlemen; "why, the woods are actually swarming with boars! If I cared to hunt near the old thicket, I could raise ten of them in less than five minutes."

Monsoreau turned pale, in spite of himself; the old thicket was the very part of the wood to which Roland had led him.

"Yes, yes," cried the gentlemen in chorus, "let us have a hunt to-morrow!"

"What do you say to to-morrow, Monsoreau?" asked the prince.

"I am always at your highness's orders," answered Monsoreau; "but, as monseigneur himself deigned to notice a moment ago, I am tired out, too much so to lead a hunt to-morrow. Besides, I must visit the neighborhood and examine the condition of our woods."

"And then, hang it! we must allow him to see his wife,

gentlemen," said the prince in a tone of jovial good nature that convinced the poor husband that François was his rival.

"We do! we do!" cried the young people, gayly. "We allow M. de Monsoreau twenty-four hours to do everything in his woods he has to do in them."

"Yes, gentlemen," said the count, "grant me these twenty-four hours, and I promise you I'll employ them well."

"I permit you to retire now, M. le Comte," said the duke. "Let M. de Monsoreau be shown to his apartments."

M. de Monsoreau bowed himself out, relieved of that great burden, constraint.

Those who are in affliction are even fonder of solitude than are fortunate lovers.

CHAPTER LXII.

HOW KING HENRI LEARNED OF HIS BELOVED BROTHER'S FLIGHT, AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

ONCE the grand huntsman was out of the hall, the gayety and joyousness of the banquet grew more unrestrained and hilarious than ever.

The count's gloomy face had produced a slightly sobering effect on the young gentlemen: for, beneath his weariness, partly affected but mostly real, they were able to get some slight glimpse of the utter joylessness of his soul and its absorption in the most dismal thoughts, thoughts that stamped his brow with the seal of a desperate sorrow and aggravated the repulsive characteristics of his physiognomy.

On his departure the prince, who was always embarrassed in his presence, resumed his air of tranquillity.

"Livarot," said he, "you were beginning to tell us of your escape from Paris when the grand huntsman entered. Continue."

And Livarot continued.

But as our title of historian gives us the privilege of knowing even better than Livarot what had taken place, we will substitute our narrative for that of the young man. The story will, perhaps, lose something in color, but it will gain in the perfection of its details, as we know what Livarot could not know, namely, all the events that occurred in the Louvre.

Toward the middle of the night, Henri III. was roused from his slumbers by an unusual uproar in his palace, in which, as soon as the King had retired, the most profound silence was enjoined.

There were oaths, blows of halberds on the walls, rapid running through the galleries, imprecations loud enough to raise the dead; and, amid all the crashing and banging and roaring and cursing, these words were heard, repeated by a thousand echoes:

"What will the King say? What will the King say?"

Henri sat up in bed and looked at Chicot, who, after supping with his Majesty, had fallen asleep in a large elbow-chair, his rapier between his legs.

The uproar grew louder.

Henri jumped out of bed, all plastered with his pomades.

"Chicot! Chicot!" he cried.

Chicot opened an eye; he was a sagacious wight, who had a strong appreciation of sleep and never quite awoke at the first call.

"You did wrong, Henri, to disturb me," said he. "I was dreaming you had a son."

"Listen!" whispered Henri; "listen!"

"Why should I listen? I should think you talk enough twaddle to me during the daytime, without wanting to encroach on my nights."

"But do you not hear?" said the King, pointing in the direction of the noise.

"Eh! By my faith, I do, really, hear cries."

"What will the King say? What will the King say?" repeated Henri. "Do you hear?"

"The hubbub is occasioned by one of two things: either your greyhound Narcisse is ill, or else the Huguenots are taking their revenge and having a Catholic Saint Bartholomew."

"Help me to dress, Chicot."

"I have no objection, but help me to rise, Henri."

"What a misfortune! What a misfortune!" was repeated in the antechambers.

"The devil's in it, or this is something serious," said Chicot.

"It would be well for us to arm ourselves," said the King.

"It would be still better," answered Chicot, "to hurry through the little door and find out for ourselves what is the trouble, instead of waiting to be told about it by others."

In a few moments, Henri, acting on Chicot's advice, passed through the secret door and entered the corridor leading to the Duc d'Anjou's apartments.

There he saw hands lifted appealingly to heaven, and heard exclamations of the most despairing character.

"Oho!" exclaimed Chicot, "I have it! Your unhappy prisoner, Henri, has strangled himself in prison. *Ventre de biche*, man, I wish you joy with all my heart. You are a greater statesman than I had any idea you were."

"No! Silence, wretch! It cannot be as you say."

"So much the worse," answered Chicot.

"Come, come on."

And Henri dragged Chicot into the duke's bedchamber.

The window was open, and a crowd of inquisitive spectators trampled on one another's feet in the effort to get a view of the rope-ladder dangling from the iron knobs on the balcony.

Henri turned as pale as a sheet.

"Well, well, my son," said Chicot, "you are not so indifferent and cynical as I thought you were."

"Fled! Escaped!" cried Henri, in such a ringing voice that all the gentlemen at once turned round.

The King's eyes flashed; his hand clutched convulsively the hilt of his dagger.

Schomberg was tearing his hair; Quélus repeatedly struck his face with his fist, and with all his strength; and Maugiron butted his head like a ram against the partition.

As for D'Épernon, he had vanished, under the specious pretext of chasing M. d'Anjou.

The sight of the despair of his favorites and of the injury they were doing themselves restored the King's calmness in a moment.

"Compose yourself, my son," he said to Maugiron, placing his arm round his waist.

"No, *mordieu*! Devil take me if I don't break my neck on account of it!" And the young man made another attempt to dash out his brains, not against the partition, but against the wall.

"Hello, there!" cried Henri. "some one help me to restrain him."

"I say, comrade," said Chicot, "can you find no easier death than the one you're seeking? What prevents you from passing your sword neatly through your stomach, and so making an end of it?"

"Hold your tongue, you murderer!" cried Henri, with tears in his eyes.

During this time, Quélus had managed to lacerate his cheeks in a frightful manner.

"Oh! Quélus, my child," said Henri, "do you want to look as ugly as Schomberg after he had been dipped in indigo? If you do, my dear boy, you will be frightful."

Quélus stopped.

Schomberg alone continued to tear his hair. He was weeping with rage.

"Schomberg! Schomberg! My dear Schomberg!" cried Henri, "be reasonable, I beseech you."

"It will drive me mad!"

"Bah!" said Chicot.

"In fact, it is a very great misfortune," said Henri, "and that is the very reason why you should try to keep in your sober senses, Schomberg. Yes, it is a frightful misfortune; I am ruined! There will be a civil war now in my kingdom. Ah! who has dealt me this blow? Who furnished the ladder? God's death! I'll have the whole city hanged, or I'll know!"

All who heard the King were thoroughly terrified.

"Who is the traitor? Where is he? Ten thousand crowns to him who tells me his name, a hundred thousand to the man that delivers him up, dead or alive."

"Who could it be except an Angevine?" cried Maugiron.

"By heavens! you are right," said Henri. "Ah! the Angevines. *mordieu!* the Angevines — Oh! they shall pay me for this!"

And as if this word had been a spark flung into a powder-magazine, a tremendous explosion of cries and threats broke out against the Angevines.

"Undoubtedly, the Angevines!" cried Quélus.

"Where are they?" howled Schomberg.

"Rip them open!" bawled Maugiron.

"A hundred gibbets for a hundred Angevines!" shouted the King.

Chicot could not remain silent in the midst of this general madness: drawing his rapier and flourishing it with the most exaggerated bravado, he laid about him in every direction, striking the minions with the flat of the sword, fencing at the wall, and all the time repeating:

"Oh, *ventre de biche* ! oh, what manly rage ! ah ! damnation ! death to the Angevines, I say ! death to the Angevines !"

This cry : "Death to the Angevines ! was heard throughout the city, as the cry of the Hebrew mothers was once heard throughout all Rama.

Meanwhile Henri was no longer in the room.

The thought suddenly occurred to him that it would be a wise idea to visit his mother, who had been somewhat neglected of late, and, slipping quietly out of the room, he directed his steps to her apartments.

Under an appearance of detachment from the world, Catharine was really waiting for the time when her policy, as she saw with her Florentine penetration, would be again in the ascendant.

When Henri entered, she was reclining in a large armchair, evidently in a pensive mood ; with her fat and somewhat yellowish cheeks, with the fixed stare in her brilliant eyes, and with her plump but pale hands, she bore a stronger resemblance to a waxen statue of Meditation than she did to a living, animated human being.

But at the news of the escape of François, news which Henri announced with the utmost bluntness, for he was on fire with anger and hatred, the statue seemed suddenly to awake to life, although the movement that told of this awaking consisted in leaning farther back in her chair and in a silent shake of the head.

"Mother," said Henri, "you do not express any indignation !"

"Why should I do so, my son ? " asked Catharine.

"What ! your son's escape does not strike you as criminal, dangerous, and deserving of the severest punishment ?"

"My dear son, liberty is well worth a crown ; and remember, I advised you to fly in order to gain a crown."

"Mother, he outrages me."

Catharine shrugged her shoulders.

"Mother, he braves me."

"Oh, no," answered Catharine ; "he escapes ; that is all."

"Ah !" he rejoined, "this is how you take my part."

"What do you mean, my son ?"

"I mean that the feelings are deadened by age ; I mean that" —

He paused.

"What are you saying?" asked Catharine, with her customary serenity.

"That you no longer love me as you once did."

"You are mistaken," said Catharine, with increasing coldness. "You are my best-beloved son, Henri. But he of whom you complain is also my son."

"Ah! I do not want any of your commonplaces of maternal morality, madame," said Henri, furiously; "we all know what they are worth."

"Indeed! Certainly you ought to know better than any one; for my maternal morality has always changed to weakness where you were concerned."

"And, as your present leanings are in the direction of repentance, you repent of that, too."

"I saw clearly, my son," said she, "that we must come to this in the end. That was the reason why I kept silent."

"Adieu, madame, adieu," answered Henri. "I know now what I have to do since my mother no longer sympathizes with me. I can find other counsellors, however, who will befriend me in my just indignation and advise me in this critical juncture."

"Go, my son," said the Florentine, calmly, "and may your counsellors have the guidance of God! they will certainly need it if they are going to be any help to you in your present difficulties."

And she did not make a gesture or utter a word to detain him.

"Adieu, madame," repeated Henri.

But when near the door he paused.

"Adieu, Henri," said the queen. "But one word more. I do not presume to advise you, my son; I am fully aware you do not require my support; but entreat your counsellors to reflect well before coming to any decision, and to reflect more deeply still before carrying that decision into effect."

"Yes, yes," said Henri, making his mother's last words an excuse for not advancing further, "for the position is a difficult one, is it not, madame?"

"Yes; it is grave," said Catharine, slowly raising her eyes and hands to heaven; "very grave indeed, my son."

The King, impressed by the terror he thought he read in his mother's eyes, came up close to her.

"Have you any idea, mother," he asked, "who it was that carried him off?"

Catharine did not reply.

"I believe," said Henri, "it was the Angevines."

Catharine smiled, with that air of feline astuteness which was in her the index of a superior mind ever on the watch to confuse and overawe the minds of others.

"The Angevines?" she repeated.

"You do not believe it," said Henri; "and yet everybody believes it."

Catharine simply shrugged her shoulders.

"As for what others believe, it does not matter; but what do you believe, my son?"

"Nay, madame, — what do you mean? Explain yourself, I beseech you."

"What good will an explanation do?"

"It will enlighten me."

"Enlighten you! Nonsense, Henri, I am but a doting old woman; my only influence lies in my prayers and repentance."

"No, speak, speak, mother, I am eager to hear you. You are still, and must be ever, the very soul of us all."

"It would be useless: my ideas are the ideas of another age, and self-distrust warps the intelligence of the old. Can old Catharine, at her time of life, offer any advice that is worth listening to? Nonsense, my son, that is impossible."

"Be it so, then, mother," said Henri; "you may refuse me your support, you may deprive me of your aid, but in an hour, whatever may be your opinion, — I shall possibly learn it then, — I will have all the Angevines in Paris hanged."

"Have the Angevines hanged!" cried Catharine, amazed, as are all superior minds when they hear for the first time of some act that is enormously stupid as well as enormously wicked.

"Yes; hanged, massacred, butchered, burned. At this very moment my friends are running through the city to break the bones of these accursed rebels and bandits!"

"Let them take good care not to do any such thing, the wretches!" cried Catharine, aroused by the serious nature of the situation. "They would ruin themselves, which is nothing; but they would ruin you also."

"How?"

"Oh, blind! blind!" murmured Catharine. "Will kings eternally have eyes, and see not?"

And she wrung her hands.

"Kings are kings only as long as they avenge the wrongs that are done them, and in the present case my whole realm will rise up to defend me."

"Fool, madman, child," murmured the Florentine.

"Why, and how?"

"Think you you can hang, and butcher, and burn men like Bussy, and Antragnet, and Ribeirac, and Livarot without causing oceans of blood to flow?"

"What matter, provided they are killed?"

"Oh, yes, yes, provided they are killed; show me their dead bodies, and, by our Lady, I will tell you you have done well! But you will not kill them; you will, on the contrary, supply them with a reason for raising the standard of revolt; you will, with your own hand, place in theirs the naked sword they would of themselves have never dared to unsheathe for such a master as François. Your imprudence gives them their opportunity. They will draw it to defend their lives, and your kingdom will rise, not for you, but against you."

"But if I do not avenge my wrongs, I show fear, I seem to recoil," cried Henri.

"Has any one ever said that I showed fear?" said Catharine, pressing her teeth on her thin, carmine-tinged lips.

"But, if it was the Angevines, they deserve punishment, mother."

"Yes, if it was they; but it was not."

"Who could it be, if not my brother's friends?"

"It was not your brother's friends, for your brother has no friends."

"Then who was it?"

"Your enemies, or, rather, your enemy."

"What enemy?"

"Ah, my son, you know well that you have never had but one, just as your brother Charles never had but one, and just as I have never had but one, — one who is ever the same persistent foe."

"Do you mean Henri de Navarre?"

"Yes, Henri de Navarre."

"He is not in Paris!"

"Ah! do you know who is in Paris or who is not? Do you know anything? Have you eyes and ears? Do the people around you see and hear? No, you are all deaf, you are all blind."

"Henri de Navarre!" repeated the King.

"My son, whenever disappointment is your portion, whenever misfortune is your lot, whenever a catastrophe whose author is unknown to you befalls you, do not search, or conjecture, or inquire. — it is useless. Cry aloud: 'Henri de Navarre!' and you will be sure you are speaking the truth. Strike in the quarter where he stands, and you will be sure to strike right. Oh! that man! that man! He is the sword of God suspended above the house of Valois!"

"You are of opinion, then, that I should countermand my orders in respect to the Angevines?"

"At once," cried Catharine. "do not lose a minute, do not lose a second. Hasten, it may be already too late: run and revoke your orders: begone, or you are lost."

And seizing her son by the arm she hurried him to the door with a strength and energy that were amazing in a woman of her age.

Henri rushed out of the Louvre in search of his friends.

But he found only Chicot, sitting on a stone and tracing geographical outlines on the sand.

PART III.

CHAPTER LXIII.

HOW CHICOT AGREED WITH THE QUEEN MOTHER, AND HOW
THE KING AGREED WITH BOTH.

HENRI approached and saw that it was, indeed, the Gascon, who, quite as absorbed in his work as was Archimedes once upon a time, seemed determined not to raise his head, though Paris were taken by storm.

"Ha! knave," cried Henri, in a voice of thunder, "this is the way, then, you defend your King?"

"Yes, I defend him in my own way, and I think it is a good way."

"A good way!" exclaimed Henri, "a good way, you laggard!"

"I maintain and will prove it."

"I am curious to have your proof."

"It is easy to do so: in the first place, we have committed a great folly, my worthy King, an enormous folly."

"By doing what?"

"By doing what we have done."

"Ah!" murmured Henri, struck by the harmony between the opinions of two supremely astute minds that had reached the same result and yet had never come in contact.

"Yes," answered Chicot, "by getting our friends to howl: 'Death to the Angevines!' through the city. And, now that I have reflected, I am unable to see that the Angevines had anything to do with the business. Your friends, I repeat, by crying through the city 'Death to the Angevines!' are simply starting that little civil war which the Guises could not start, but of which they stand in great need. And now, look you, Henri, one of two things has happened: either your friends have come to an untimely end, which would not grieve me

greatly, I confess, but which would sadden you excessively, I know; or they have chased the Angevines out of the city, which would be a great misfortune for you, but, on the other hand, would give boundless satisfaction to that dear friend of ours, Anjou."

"*Mordieu!*" cried the King, "do you believe things have gone as far as you say?"

"Yes, if they have not gone farther."

"But all this does not explain what you are doing on that stone."

"I am engaged on a very urgent task, my son."

"What is it?"

"I am tracing a plan of all the provinces your brother will raise against us, and I am reckoning up the number of men each will contribute to the revolt."

"Chicot! Chicot," cried the King, "am I to have none about me but birds of ill-omen!"

"The owl hoots by night, my son," answered Chicot, "for it is his hour for hooting. Now this is a gloomy time, my Harry, so gloomy that, in truth, there is very little difference between night and day, and so I indulge in a little hooting that it might be well for you to listen to. Look!"

"Look at what?"

"Look at my map, and judge. Here is Anjou; is n't it like a little tart? Do you see? it's the spot to which your brother has fled; so I have given it the place of honor. Hum! Anjou, well handled, well worked, as your friend Bussy and your grand huntsman Monsoreau will handle and work it, Anjou, I say, can furnish us — and, when I say 'us,' I mean your brother — Anjou can furnish your brother with ten thousand soldiers."

"You think so?"

"It's the minimum. Let us pass on to Guienne; you see it, don't you? that figure like a calf limping on one leg. Ah, faith, you needn't be astonished to find a good many discontented people in that same Guienne! It is an old focus of revolt; why, the English can hardly be said to be yet out of it. Guienne, then, will be tickled to death at the chances of rising, not against you, but against France. We may put down Guienne for eight thousand fighters. It isn't much; but don't be uneasy, they are inured to war and masters of their trade. Next, here on the left, don't you see them? We

have Béarn and Navarre, two divisions that have some resemblance to a monkey on the back of an elephant. Navarre, I know, has been a good deal mutilated, but, with Béarn, it has still a population of three or four hundred thousand men. Suppose, now, that Béarn and Navarre, which have been very much squeezed and battered and shattered by my Harry, should furnish five per cent. of their population, or sixteen thousand men to the League — Let us count up: ten thousand for Anjou” —

And Chicot began tracing figures on the sand with his switch —

- - - - -	10,000
Eight thousand for Guienne - - - - -	8,000
Sixteen thousand for Béarn and Navarre - - - - -	16,000
Total - - - - -	34,000

“ You think, then, the King of Navarre will form an alliance with my brother ? ” said Henri.

“ Well, I should say so ! ”

“ You think, then, he had something to do with my brother’s escape ? ”

Chicot stared at the King.

“ Harry,” said he, “ that is not your own idea.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ Because it is too sensible, my son.”

“ No matter whose idea it is ; I am questioning you, it is for you to answer. Do you think that Henri de Navarre had anything to do with the escape of my brother ? ”

“ Hum ! I remember hearing somewhere in the Rue de la Ferrounerie a ‘ *ventre saint-gris*, ’ and, now that I recall it, that seems to me to be rather conclusive.”

“ You heard a ‘ *ventre saint-gris* ’ ! ” cried the King.

“ Faith, yes,” answered Chicot, “ I only called it to mind to-day.”

“ He was in Paris, then ? ”

“ I believe so.”

“ And what makes you believe so ? ”

“ My eyes.”

“ You saw Henri de Navarre ? ”

“ Yes.”

"And you never told me that my enemy had dared to come and brave me even in my capital?"

"A man is a gentleman or he is n't," answered Chicot.

"What follows?"

"Well, if a man is a gentleman, he is n't a spy; does n't that follow?"

Henri became thoughtful.

"So," said he, "Anjou and Béarn! My brother François and my cousin Henri!"

"And, of course, without reckoning the three Guises."

"What! Do you suppose they will all make an alliance together?"

"Thirty-four thousand men in one quarter," said Chicot, counting on his fingers: ten thousand for Anjou, eight thousand for Guienne, sixteen thousand for Béarn, plus twenty or twenty-five thousand under the orders of M. de Guise, as lieutenant-general of your armies; sum total, fifty-nine thousand men. Suppose we reduce it to fifty thousand, on account of gout, rheumatism, sciatica, and other diseases, we have still, you see, my son, a very pretty sum total."

"But Henri de Navarre and the Duc de Guise are enemies?"

"Which will not prevent them from combining against you: they can exterminate each other when they have exterminated you."

"You are right, Chicot, my mother is right, you are both right; we must prevent an outbreak; help me to get the Swiss together."

"Eh? The Swiss, is it? Quélus took them with him."

"My guards, then."

"They're gone with Schomberg."

"The men of my household, at least."

"Are off with Maugiron."

"What!" cried Henri, "without my orders!"

"And pray, since when, Henri, have you begun giving orders? Oh, yes, when it is a question of processions and flagellations you are ready enough with your orders, I admit. You are then allowed to do as you like with your own skin and even with the skins of others. But when it is a question of war, when it is a question of government!—oh, that is for M. de Schomberg, and M. de Quélus, and M. de Maugiron. As for D'Épernon, he don't count, since he is in hiding."

"*Mordieu!*" cried Henri; "so that is the way things are going on!"

"Permit me, my son, to observe that it is rather late in the day for you to discover you are only the seventh or eighth king in your kingdom."

Henri bit his lips and stamped on the ground.

"Ah!" exclaimed Chicot, peering into the darkness.

"What is the matter?" inquired the King.

"*Ventre de biche!* there they are, Henri; yonder are your friends."

And he pointed to three or four cavaliers riding toward them and followed at a distance by some other men on horseback, and a large number on foot.

The cavaliers were just about to enter the Louvre, never noticing the two men standing near the fosse and, indeed, almost invisible in the darkness.

"Schomberg!" cried the King; "this way, Schomberg!"

"Hullo!" said Schomberg; "who calls me?"

"Come here, my child, come here!"

Schomberg thought he knew the voice and approached.

"Why," he exclaimed, "God damn me if it is not the King!"

"Yes, myself; I was going after you, but did not know where you were; I have been waiting for you impatiently; what have you been doing?"

"What have we been doing?" said a second cavalier, drawing near.

"Ah, come here, Quélus, you, too," said the King, "and never again set out in this fashion without my permission."

"It is no longer necessary," said a third, whom the King recognized to be Maugiron, "for all is over."

"All is over?" repeated the King.

"God be praised!" cried D'Épernon, suddenly appearing, without any one knowing where he sprang from.

"Hosanna!" cried Chicot, raising his hands to heaven.

"Then you have killed them?" said the King.

And he whispered to himself:

"When all is said and done, the dead never return."

"You have killed them?" asked Chicot; "ah! if you killed them, there is nothing more to be said!"

"We did not have that trouble," answered Schomberg; "the cowards fled like a flock of pigeons; we have hardly been able to cross swords with them."

Henri turned pale.

"And with whom did you cross swords?" he asked.

"With Antragnet."

"You gave him his quietus, anyway."

"Quite the contrary — he killed one of Quélus's lackeys."

"They were on their guard, then?"

"Faith, I should think they were!" cried Chicot. "You howl: 'Death to the Angevines!' you fire off your cannon and ring your bells and set all the old pots and pans in Paris quivering, and yet you fancy that these honest fellows must be as deaf as you are stupid."

"And now, now," murmured the King, in a hollow voice, "we have a civil war on our hands."

The words made Quélus start.

"The devil!" he exclaimed; "it is true."

"Ah!" said Chicot; "you are beginning to perceive it, are you? That is fortunate. Here are Schomberg and Maugiron, who have not the slightest suspicion of it, so far."

"We can think of nothing," answered Schomberg, "except of our duty to defend his Majesty's person and crown."

"Oh, indeed!" said Chicot; "still, M. de Clisson has something to do in that line; he does n't shout so loud, but he will acquit himself of his task at least as well as you."

"But, M. Chicot," said Quélus, "although you are always pitching into us, in season and out of season, you thought just as we did two hours ago, or, at any rate, if you did n't think like us, you shouted like us."

"I?" said Chicot.

"Yes, and you even fenced at the wall, crying: 'Death to the Angevines!'"

"Oh, it is quite a different matter where I am concerned; every one knows I am a fool; but for men of your high intelligence to" —

"Come, come, gentlemen," said Henri. "peace; we'll soon have quite enough of war."

"What are your Majesty's orders?" said Quélus.

"That you show the same zeal in calming the people that you have in stirring them up. Lead back the Swiss, the guards, and the people of my household to the Louvre, and have the gates shut. I should wish the Parisians to-morrow to look on the whole thing as a mere drunken frolic."

The young gentlemen went away, looking rather foolish, and

passed the King's orders to the officers who had accompanied them during their escapade.

As for Henri, he returned to his mother, who, though gloomy and dispirited, was very busy giving orders to her people.

"Well," said she, "what has happened?"

"Just what you had predicted, mother."

"They have fled?"

"Alas! yes."

"Ah!" said she; "and what next?"

"Nothing; I think what did occur was quite enough."

"The city?"

"Is in a tumult; but the city does not trouble me — I have the city under my thumb."

"I know," said Catharine; "then it is the provinces."

"Which will revolt, rise in rebellion," continued Henri.

"What do you intend doing?"

"I see but one way of acting."

"What is it?"

"To accept the situation frankly."

"In what manner?"

"I intend to give my orders to my colonels and guards, arm the militia, withdraw the army from La Charité, and march on Anjou."

"And what about M. de Guise?"

"M. de Guise? Oh, I'll arrest him, if necessary."

"Ah, yes, it would be all very well if these violent measures could succeed."

"But what else can I do?"

Catharine dropped her head on her breast and reflected for a moment.

"The plan you have mentioned is impracticable, my son," said she.

"Ah!" cried Henri, fretfully; "it would seem as if nothing I think of to-day has any value."

"No, but you are agitated; try to regain your composure, and we will see."

"Then, mother, invent ideas for me; we must do something, we must act."

"You can see for yourself, my son, that I was giving orders."

"For what?"

"For the departure of an ambassador."

“To whom are we sending him?”

“To your brother.”

“An ambassador to that traitor! You degrade me, mother.”

“This is not the moment to be proud,” said Catharine, sternly.

“An ambassador to ask for peace?”

“To buy it, if need be.”

“For what advantages in return?”

“What, my son!” answered the Florentine; “why, after the peace has been concluded, you can secure quietly the persons of those who have made war on you. Have you not just said you should like to have them in your power?”

“Oh! I would give four provinces of my kingdom for that, a province for every man.”

“Then, to secure the end you must employ the means,” answered Catharine, in thrilling tones that aroused all the feelings of hatred and vengeance in Henri’s heart.

“I believe you are right, mother,” said he; “but whom shall we send?”

“Search among your friends.”

“Useless, mother; I do not know a single man to whom I could entrust such a mission.”

“Entrust it to a woman, then.”

“To a woman, mother! Would you consent?”

“My son, I am very old and very weary, and death, perhaps, will await me on my return hither; but I will make this journey so quickly that I shall be at Angers before your brother and your brother’s friends have had time to realize their power.”

“O mother! kind, good mother!” cried Henri, kissing her hands passionately, “you are always my support, my good genius, and my savior!”

“Which means I am always Queen of France,” murmured Catharine, regarding her son with eyes in which there was, at least, as much pity as tenderness.

CHAPTER LXIV.

IN WHICH IT IS PROVED THAT GRATITUDE WAS ONE OF
SAINT-LUC'S VIRTUES.

THE morning after the night when M. de Monsoreau had made such a pitiable appearance at the Duc d'Anjou's supper that he was allowed to retire before the end, the count rose very early and descended into the courtyard of the palace.

He had decided on interviewing the groom whom he had met before, and, if it were possible, extracting from him some information as to the habits of Roland.

He entered a large outhouse where forty magnificent steeds were munching contentedly the straw and oats of Anjou.

His first glance was for Roland.

Roland was in his stall and enjoying the bounteous repast before him to his heart's content.

His second glance was for the groom.

The groom was standing, with folded arms, giving all his attention, as an honest groom should do, to the more or less greedy fashion in which his master's horses were swallowing their customary provender.

"I say, my good fellow," said the count, "would you tell me if it is the habit of the horses of his highness to return to the stables of their own accord, and if they are trained to do so?"

"No, M. le Comte," answered the groom. "Has your question reference to any particular horse?"

"Yes, to Roland."

"Ah, now I remember, Roland did return alone yesterday; but that does not surprise me in the least, he is a very intelligent beast."

"Yes," said Monsoreau, "I saw that myself; did he ever do so before?"

"No, monsieur," answered the groom. "The Duc d'Anjou rides him usually. The duke is a fine horseman and not easily thrown."

"I was not thrown off, my friend," said the count, annoyed that any man, and especially a groom, should believe he could be unhorsed, he, the grand huntsman of France! "Although I may not be as perfect a cavalier as the Duc d'Anjou, I have

a pretty good seat in the saddle. No, I tied him to a tree near a house I wished to enter. On my return, he had disappeared. I imagined that he must have been stolen, or that some gentleman, happening to pass that way, had played a stupid trick on me by taking my horse to the city with him. That is the reason why I asked you who had led him to the stable."

"He came back alone, as the major-domo had the honor of telling you yesterday, M. le Comte."

"It is strange," said Monsoreau.

He remained in deep thought for a moment; then, changing the conversation:

"Does his highness ride this horse often?" said he.

"He used to ride him almost every day before his stud arrived."

"Did his highness return late yesterday evening?"

"About an hour before yourself, M. le Comte."

"And what horse did he ride? Was it not a bay with white feet, and a star on the forehead?"

"No, monsieur; yesterday his highness rode Isolín," answered the groom; "the one yonder."

"And was there no gentleman in the prince's suite mounted on a horse like the one I have described?"

"I do not know any one who has such a horse."

"That will do," said Monsoreau, impatient at succeeding so badly in his investigations; "that will do, thanks. Saddle me Roland."

"You want Roland, M. le Comte?"

"Yes. Has the prince ordered you not to give him to me?"

"No, monsieur; on the contrary, his highness' equerry has ordered me to place the entire stable at your disposal."

How he angry with a prince who was so exceedingly courteous?

M. de Monsoreau made a sign to the groom, who at once set about saddling the horse.

When this task was accomplished he led Roland to the count.

"Listen," said Monsoreau, taking the reins in his hands, "and answer me."

"With the greatest pleasure, M. le Comte," replied the groom.

"How much do you earn a year?"

"Twenty crowns, monsieur."

"Would you like to earn ten years' wages at one stroke?"

"Shouldn't I, though!" said the groom. "But how am I to do it?"

"Find out who rode yesterday the bay with the white feet and the star on the forehead."

"Ah, monsieur," answered the groom, "it will be very hard for me to do that! There are so many noblemen constantly paying visits to his highness."

"Yes; but two hundred crowns make a rather neat little sum, and it ought to be worth while going to some trouble to get hold of them."

"Undoubtedly, M. le Comte; and so, I am not refusing your offer; far from it."

"Very good," said the count. "I am pleased with your readiness. Here are ten crowns, to encourage you; you see, whatever happens, you don't lose anything."

"Thanks, M. le Comte."

"And now you will tell the prince I have gone to inspect the wood and to have everything ready for the hunt he has ordered for to-morrow."

As he finished speaking, the straw behind him crackled under the footsteps of another visitor.

The count turned round.

"M. de Bussy!" he exclaimed.

"Eh! it is you, M. de Monsoreau?" said Bussy; "good morning; I am quite surprised to meet you at Angers."

"And I am equally surprised to meet you, monsieur; I was told you were ill."

"And you were correctly informed," answered Bussy; "my doctor orders absolute rest, and I have not been outside the city during the past week. Ah, you are, it appears, going to ride Roland, are you? I sold the beast to M. d'Anjou, and he is so proud of him that he rides him almost every day."

Monsoreau turned pale.

"Yes," said he, "I can easily understand that; Roland is a first-rate animal."

"It was a lucky chance for you to hit on that horse for your ride to-day."

"Oh, Roland and I are old acquaintances," replied the count, "I rode him yesterday."

"And you liked him so well that you are going to mount him again to-day?"

"Yes," said the count.

"Excuse me," resumed Bussy, "I think I heard you speaking of getting up a hunt for us?"

"The prince desires to course a stag."

"Is it true, as I have heard, that there are many in the neighborhood?"

"Yes."

"And where do you intend starting the animal?"

"Near Méridor."

It was now Bussy's turn to change color, which he did, in spite of himself.

"Will you be one of the party?" asked Monsoreau.

"No, a thousand thanks," answered Bussy, "I shall go to bed now; I have become feverish again."

"Well, upon my word!" cried a voice from the threshold of the stable; "this is a nice state of things! M. de Bussy out of bed without my permission!"

"Le Haudouin!" exclaimed Bussy; "good, now I'm in for a scolding. Good-by, count; take care of Roland."

"You may rest easy on that point."

Bussy withdrew, and M. de Monsoreau leaped into the saddle.

"What ails you?" inquired Le Haudouin; "you are so pale that I am almost inclined to believe you are ill myself."

"Do you know where he is going?" said Bussy.

"No."

"To Méridor."

"Well, did you expect him to keep away from it?"

"Great God! what will happen, after what he saw yesterday?"

"Madame de Monsoreau will deny everything."

"But he saw her."

"She will insist he must have been purblind at the time."

"Diane will never have the strength to do that."

"Oh, M. de Bussy, is it possible that you are so ignorant of women?"

"Rémy, I feel very ill."

"I can see you are. Go home, and be sure you take my prescription for this morning."

"What is it?"

"Some stewed chicken, a slice of ham, and a bisk of crawfish."

"Oh, I'm not hungry."

"The more reason why you should obey my orders and eat."

"Rémy, I have a presentiment that this ruffian will create a terrible scene at Méridor. I see now I should have accepted his invitation and gone with him when he asked me."

"For what purpose?"

"To support Diane."

"Diane, I tell you, can support herself; I said so before, and I repeat it; and, as you must do something to support yourself also, come along with me at once. Besides, you know well you ought not to let people see you up. Why did you quit your room without my leave?"

"I was so uneasy I couldn't stay in."

Rémy shrugged his shoulders, carried off Bussy, and saw to it that he was seated before a well-supplied table behind closed doors, while M. de Monsoreau passed out of Angers by the same gate as on the previous evening.

The count had had his own reasons for requesting to be allowed to ride Roland again: he wanted to make sure whether it was chance or habit that had guided this animal, so universally praised for his intelligence, to the park wall.

As soon as Monsoreau was outside the palace grounds he dropped the reins on the horse's neck.

Roland did exactly what his rider expected him to do.

As soon as he was beyond the gate he turned to the left. M. de Monsoreau gave him full liberty to do so. After a time he swerved to the right; M. de Monsoreau did not interfere with him this time either.

Horse and rider soon found themselves in the charming flowery path already mentioned, then near the thicket and among the giant trees.

Just as had happened on the evening before, Roland's trot quickened as they approached Méridor, and speedily changed into a gallop. At the end of forty or fifty minutes the count was in sight of the wall — in sight of that part of it with which he was already acquainted.

But the place was now solitary and silent; no neigh heard; no horse was seen, either tied to a tree or wandering at liberty.

M. de Monsoreau alighted; but, to make sure that he should not have to return on foot to Angers this time, he held the reins while he climbed the wall.

The park was as quiet and lonely within the enclosure as without. The long avenues were unrolled before his eyes, until they were lost in the distance, and a few bounding roebucks alone gave a touch of life to the deserted turf of the vast greenswards.

The count concluded it was useless to waste his time in watching for people who were on their guard, and who, alarmed at his appearance on the previous evening, had either postponed their meetings or selected another place for them. He mounted again, turned into a little side path, and, after a quarter of an hour, during which he had to keep a tight rein over Roland, he reached the portecullis.

The baron, to keep his dogs up to the mark, was giving them a touch of the lash at the time the count was passing over the drawbridge.

As soon as he saw his son-in-law he advanced ceremoniously to meet him.

Diane, seated under a magnificent sycamore, was reading the poems of Marot. Gertrude, her faithful attendant, was embroidering by her side.

The count, after saluting the baron, perceived the two women.

He jumped from his horse and approached them.

Diane rose, advanced three steps to meet the count, and made him a grave courtesy.

"What coolness! or, rather, what perfidy!" murmured the count. "What a tempest I shall raise on the bosom of those stagnant waters!"

A lackey came up. The grand huntsman threw him the reins, and turned to Diane.

"Madame," said he, "may I speak with you privately for a few moments?"

"Of course, monsieur," answered Diane.

"Do you intend doing us the honor of staying at the castle, M. le Comte?" inquired the baron.

"Yes, monsieur; at least until to-morrow."

The baron withdrew to inspect the chamber of his son-in-law and see that all the laws of hospitality were observed in his regard.

Monsoreau motioned Diane to the chair in which she had been sitting; he himself sat down on that of Gertrude, at the same time bending a look on his wife that would have intimidated the most resolute man.

"Madame," said he, "who was with you in the park yesterday evening?"

Diane gazed at her husband with pure and limpid eyes.

"At what hour, monsieur?" she asked, in tones from which the power of her will had succeeded in banishing all emotion.

"At six."

"In what place?"

"Near the old thicket."

"It must have been one of my friends who took a walk in that direction; certainly it was not I."

"It was you, madame," said Monsoreau.

"Why, how can you know?"

For a moment Monsoreau was struck dumb, and could not utter a word in reply, but his anger soon got the better of his stupefaction.

"Tell me the name of this man," said he.

"Of what man?"

"The man who was walking with you."

"How can I tell you when I was not out walking at the time?"

"It was you, I tell you," cried Monsoreau, stamping on the ground.

"You are mistaken, monsieur," replied Diane, coldly.

"Why do you dare to deny it when I saw you?"

"Saw me yourself, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame; saw you myself. Why, then, do you dare to deny it was you, since you are the only woman staying at Méridor?"

"There, again, you are mistaken, monsieur; Jeanne de Bris-sac is here."

"Madame de Saint-Luc?"

"Yes, Madame de Saint-Luc, who is my friend."

"And M. de Saint-Luc?"

"Never leaves his wife, as you know; theirs was a marriage of love; it was M. de Saint-Luc and Madame de Saint-Luc you saw."

"It was not M. de Saint-Luc; it was not Madame de Saint-Luc. It was you, whom I recognized perfectly, with a man whom I do not know, but whom I will know, I swear to you."

"Do you persist in saying it was I, monsieur?"

"Why, I tell you I recognized you; I tell you I heard the cry you uttered."

"When you have recovered your senses, monsieur, I shall be ready to listen to you; at present, I think I had better retire."

"No, madame," exclaimed Monsoreau, holding Diane by the arm, "you shall remain!"

"Monsieur," said Diane, "M. and Madame de Saint-Luc are coming toward us. I hope you will show a little self-restraint in their presence."

Diane was right. Saint-Luc and his wife had just come into view at the end of an alley, evidently summoned by the dinner-bell, which was now set a-going again, as if to inform Monsoreau that he was the only loiterer.

Both recognized the count, and, guessing that their presence was likely to relieve Diane from great embarrassment, they advanced quickly.

Madame de Saint-Luc made a sweeping reverence to M. de Monsoreau.

Saint-Luc offered his hand cordially.

After the usual compliments, Saint-Luc handed his wife to Monsoreau and took Diane's arm himself.

Dinner always began at nine in the manor of Méridor: it was an old custom, dating from the times of good King Louis XII., which the baron observed in all its integrity.

M. de Monsoreau found that the seat assigned him was between Saint-Luc and his wife.

Diane, separated from her husband by her friend's skilful manœuvring, sat between Saint-Luc and the baron.

The conversation was general: it naturally turned on the arrival of the King's brother at Angers and the condition of affairs his arrival was likely to create in the province.

Monsoreau tried to lead it to other subjects: but the others showed such a decided disinclination to follow him that he had to give up the attempt in despair.

It was not that Saint-Luc refused to answer his questions, quite the contrary; he courted and flattered the furious husband in the most charming manner imaginable, and Diane, who, owing to Saint-Luc's prattle, was able to remain silent, thanked him with many an eloquent look.

"This Saint-Luc is an idiot," said the count to himself, "and chatters like a magpie; he's the very man to let out the secret I want to know; I'll tear it from him some way or other."

M. de Monsoreau did not know Saint-Lue, having come to court only just at the moment when the latter was leaving it.

So, having this idea of the young man, he answered him with a politeness that gave great pleasure to Diane and contributed to the general comfort of the baron's guests.

Moreover, Madame de Monsoreau could read a look in Saint-Lue's eyes that said plainly :

"Do not be uneasy, madame, for I am devising a plan."

What Saint-Luc's plan was we shall learn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER LXV.

SAINT-LUC'S PLAN.

WHEN dinner was over, Monsoreau took his new friend's arm and passed with him out of the castle.

"I cannot tell you how delighted I am to find you here," said he; "the loneliness of Méridor positively frightened me."

"Oh, that cannot be," answered Saint-Luc. "Have you not your wife? With such a companion I fancy I should not find a desert lonely."

"I do not say that you may not be right," said Monsoreau, biting his lips. "Still" —

"Still what?"

"Still, I am very glad to have met you here."

"Monsieur," said Saint-Luc, all the time using a little gold tooth-pick, "it is your politeness makes you say so; I will not believe that you can ever be bored in the company of such a wife and living in such a beautiful country."

"Bah!" answered Monsoreau, "I have spent half my life in the woods."

"The more reason, then, why they should not bore you. In my opinion, the more familiar you are with these woods, the more you must love them. I shall feel very badly myself, I can tell you, when I am forced to leave them, and, unfortunately, I fear I shall have to do so before long."

"Why should you leave them?"

"Oh, monsieur, is man ever the master of his fate? He is like a leaf that is parted from the tree and blown about by the

wind over valley and plain, unconscious whither it is going. But you must be very happy."

"Happy on account of what?"

"Dwelling beneath these magnificent elms."

"Oh, I fancy I shall not dwell beneath them very long, either."

"Nonsense! you cannot be serious. What do you mean?"

"Well, I am not such a passionate lover of nature as you are, and, I confess, I have my misgivings about this park you admire so greatly."

"Misgivings about the park, you say! And for what reason?"

"I do not think it safe."

"Not safe! You surprise me!" and Saint-Luc did look really astonished. "Is it because it is so isolated?"

"No, not on account of that exactly; for I presume you see a good deal of company at Méri-dor."

"Faith, we don't," replied Saint-Luc, in his most artless manner, "not a soul."

"You amaze me!"

"I give you my word of honor that what I say is perfectly true."

"What! do you never receive any visitors?"

"There have been none here since I came, at least."

"And has not a single gentleman from that fine court of ours at Angers ever found his way here?"

"Not one."

"That is impossible!"

"Maybe, but it is true."

"Oh, for shame! You are calumniating our Angevine gentlemen."

"I don't know whether I'm calumniating them or not. But devil take me if I have caught a glimpse of one of their plumes all the time that I have been in this neighborhood."

"Then I am wrong on that point."

"Oh, entirely wrong. But let us come back to what you were just saying about the park not being safe. Are there any bears around?"

"Oh, no."

"Wolves?"

"None either."

"Robbers?"

"Perhaps. By the way, my dear friend, you have a very beautiful wife, have you not?"

"Oh, yes, I think so."

"Does Madame de Saint-Luc walk often in the park?"

"Very often; like myself. she is very fond of the country. But why do you ask me such a question?"

"Oh, I had no particular reason. I suppose you are with her when she walks?"

"Always," said Saint-Luc.

"You mean *almost* always," continued the count.

"But what the devil are you driving at?"

"Good heavens! my dear Saint-Luc, at nothing, or, at least, at next to nothing."

"I listen."

"Well, I have been told" —

"What have you been told? Go on."

"You will not be angry?"

"I am never angry."

"Besides, between husbands these confidences are admissible; I have been told that a man was seen prowling in the park."

"A man?"

"Yes."

"Coming after my wife?"

"Oh, I do not say that."

"You would be entirely in the wrong if you did not say it, my dear M. de Monsoreau; such information must certainly have the greatest interest for me — and who saw him, if you please?"

"What is the good of saying more?"

"Oh, say everything. We came out for a talk, did we not? Well, we may as well talk about this as anything else. You say this man was after Madame de Saint-Luc. Oho! — egad, that looks serious!"

"Listen, I may as well make a clean breast of it; no. I do not believe he was looking for Madame de Saint-Luc."

"And for whom, pray?"

"I am afraid it was for Diane."

"Ah," cried Saint-Luc, "that pleases me much better."

"Why should it please you better?"

"Why should n't it? You know we husbands are the most selfish race in the world: Every man for himself and God for us all!"

"Or rather the devil!" added Monsoreau.

"Then you really believe a man got into the park?"

"I saw him; seeing is believing."

"You saw a man in the park?"

"Yes," said Monsoreau.

"Alone?"

"With Madame de Monsoreau."

"When?" asked Saint-Luc.

"Yesterday."

"Where?"

"There, on the left. Look."

And as Monsoreau had been walking with Saint-Luc in the direction of the old thicket, he was able to point out the exact place to his companion from where they stood.

"Hum!" said Saint-Luc, "that wall is in a very bad condition; I must inform the baron that some one or other is injuring his property."

"And whom do you suspect?"

"Whom do I suspect, are you asking?"

"Yes," said the count.

"Suspect of what?"

"Of climbing the wall to enter the park and talk with my wife?"

Saint-Luc seemed to be revolving the matter deeply in his mind, and Monsoreau awaited the result of his meditation anxiously.

"Well?" said he.

"Why, hang it!" answered Saint-Luc, "as far as I can see, it must have been" —

"Who?" eagerly asked the count.

"Nobody but — yourself."

"My dear M. de Saint-Luc, you are jesting," said the count, completely taken aback.

"Jesting? Faith, no. In the early days of my marriage I committed follies of that sort; why should n't you also?"

"Oh, nonsense. I see you are trying to avoid giving me an answer; confess that that is the case, my dear friend. But do not be afraid, I have courage. Help me in my search, and you will be doing me an immense favor."

Saint-Luc scratched his ear.

"I still think it was you," said he.

"A truce to raillery; try and look at the matter seriously, monsieur; for I assure you it is very important."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it, I tell you."

"Oh, then, that is different. And do you know how this man manages to enter?"

"By stealth, of course."

"Often?"

"Undoubtedly; he has left the marks of his feet on the soft stone of the wall; you can see for yourself."

"Yes, I see them."

"And you never saw anything of what I have just told you?"

"Oh," answered Saint-Luc, "I have had some suspicions."

"Ah! now we are coming to it!" gasped the count; "and what did you do?"

"I did nothing. I was not at all uneasy, for I believed it was you."

"But now that I tell you it was not?"

"I believe you, my dear monsieur."

"You believe me?"

"Yes."

"Well, and now?"

"Now I believe it was some one else."

The grand huntsman looked at him almost threateningly; but Saint-Luc never altered his affable, unruffled demeanor.

"Ah!" cried Monsoreau, in a tone so savage that the young man raised his head.

"I have another idea," said he.

"What is it?"

"What if it were" —

"Were who?"

"No."

"No?"

"But it might be" —

"Who?"

"The Duc d'Anjou."

"I thought so, too," returned the count; "but I have made inquiries and I found it could not have been he."

"Oh, the duke is a very wily intriguer."

"I know it, but it was not he."

"You are always answering: 'this is not so and that is

not so," said Saint-Luc; "yet you are asking me for information."

"Because, as you are staying at the castle, you ought to know" —

"Hold on a moment," cried Saint-Luc.

"What is it now?"

"I have another idea. If it wasn't you and if it wasn't the duke, it must have been I."

"You, Saint-Luc?"

"Why not?"

"You to come to the outside of the park and leave your horse there when there was nothing to prevent you from riding up to the castle?"

"Egad, there would be nothing strange in that. You see I am such a whimsical creature," said Saint-Luc.

"Is it likely you would have fled when you saw me on the top of the wall?"

"Faith, many would have fled for less."

"You knew, then, you were acting wrong?" said the count, whose anger was beginning to get the better of him.

"Possibly."

"Ha!" cried the count, turning pale, "so you have been jeering at me, and that for the last quarter of an hour."

"You are mistaken, monsieur," said Saint-Luc, drawing out his watch and eying Monsoreau with an expression that sent a shudder through his veins, in spite of his ferocious courage, "for twenty minutes."

"But this is an insult, monsieur!" said the count.

"And do you believe you have not insulted me, monsieur, with all those questions of yours, more worthy of a police spy than of a gentleman?"

"Ah! I see everything clearly now."

"A miracle! You see clearly at ten in the forenoon! And pray, what do you see?"

"That you have an understanding with the traitor, the coward, I was near killing yesterday."

"Nothing wonderful in that," answered Saint-Luc; "he is my friend."

"Then, if that be the case, I will kill you instead of him."

"Pshaw! in your own house, suddenly, without warning!"

"Do you think I shall be over-scrupulous about chastising a wretch like you?" cried the exasperated nobleman.

"Ah, M. de Monsoreau, how badly you have been brought up!" replied Saint-Luc, "and how sadly your manners have been spoiled by your constant association with wild beasts! Shame, shame!"

"Do you not see that I am furious!" roared the count, standing before Saint-Luc with folded arms, the hideous contraction of his features showing forth the agony and despair that tore his heart.

"*Mordieu!* I should say I did; and, to tell God's truth, there is no one in the world who can less afford to get in a rage than you; you look absolutely hideous, my dear M. de Monsoreau."

The count, beside himself, clapped his hand on his sword.

"Ah!" said Saint-Luc, "it is you who challenge me, then, not I you; for you see for yourself that I am perfectly calm."

"Yes, coxcomb," answered Monsoreau, "yes, minion, I challenge you."

"Then do me the favor, M. de Monsoreau, to climb over the wall; on the other side of the wall we shall be on neutral ground."

"What does that matter?" cried the count.

"It matters a good deal to me," answered Saint-Luc; "I should not like to kill you almost in your own house."

"Just as you like!" said Monsoreau, hastening to get over.

"Take care! gently, count! a stone there is just ready to fall; it must have been shaken pretty often. Please don't get hurt; I should never forgive myself if you did."

Then Saint-Luc followed the count, and climbed to the top of the wall.

"Come, make haste!" said Monsoreau, drawing his sword.

"Well, I came to the country for pleasure," said Saint-Luc to himself, "and, faith, I am now going to have a little of the sort of amusement I like."

And he jumped to the other side of the wall.

CHAPTER LXVI.

HOW M. DE SAINT-LUC SHOWED M. DE MONSOREAU THE
LUNGE THE KING HAD SHOWN HIM.

M. DE MONSOREAU waited for Saint-Luc, sword in hand and stamping the ground in his fury at the delay.

"Are you ready?" said he.

"I say," answered Saint-Luc, "you have taken a position that's rather to your advantage with your back to the sun; still, I don't mind."

Monsoreau wheeled round a little.

"Ah, that's an improvement," said Saint-Luc; "now I shall be better able to see what I am doing."

"Don't spare me," said the count, "for certainly I shall not spare you."

"Indeed!" answered Saint-Luc; "so you really wish to kill me, then?"

"Wish to kill you? — ah! yes — I am determined to kill you."

"Man proposes and God disposes," said Saint-Luc, drawing his sword.

"What are you saying?"

"I am saying — Look at your bed of poppies and dandelions."

"Well?"

"Well, I mean to lay you there," said Saint-Luc, laughing and placing himself on guard.

Monsoreau took the offensive impetuously and made two or three passes at his antagonist with the utmost quickness, but they were parried with a quickness equal to his own.

"*Pardieu!* monsieur," said Saint-Luc, while playing with his enemy's blade, "you have a very pretty knack with the sword, and your last thrust would have done for any one except Bussy and me."

Monsoreau turned pale: he saw at last the sort of man he had to deal with.

"You are, perhaps, surprised to find," continued Saint-Luc, "that I do not handle it so badly, either. Well, you see, the King, who, as you know, is very fond of me, used to give me lessons, and, among other things, he showed me a certain

lunge which I shall have the pleasure of showing you in a few minutes. I tell you this because, should I kill you suddenly, it must be a pleasure to you to learn that you owe your death to a lunge taught me by the King: this ought to flatter you excessively."

"You are wonderfully witty, monsieur," said Monsoreau, in a rage, at the same time aiming a thrust at him with such force that it might have pierced a wall.

"Oh, a person can only do the best he is able," answered Saint-Luc modestly, springing to one side and by this movement compelling his adversary to half turn round, with the result that he had the sun full in his eyes.

"Ah," said Saint-Luc, "now I have you where I wanted to have you before laying you in the place I intend laying you. Aha! what do you think of that last little pass? Neat, eh? Yes, I am well pleased with it, very well pleased, I assure you. Until now there were fifty chances in a hundred that you might not be killed; now there is only one."

And with a suppleness, vigor, and fury which took Monsoreau completely by surprise, and which no one would have suspected the existence of in this effeminate young man, Saint-Luc lunged five times in rapid succession at the grand huntsman, who parried the thrusts, although quite dazed by the rapidity of his adversary's movements; then Saint-Luc made a feint, parried, and thrust in a peculiar fashion, which the count did not see clearly, owing to the sunlight in his eyes, and plunged his sword into his enemy's chest.

Monsoreau remained on his feet for a moment, like an uprooted oak that is waiting for a breath of air to tell it in what direction it is to fall.

"There go your hundred chances now," said Saint-Luc, "and have the goodness to notice, monsieur, that you will fall just where I said you should."

The count's strength failed him, his hands opened, a dark cloud spread over his eyes, his knees bent under him, and he sank on the poppies, crimsoning the purple flowers with his blood. Saint-Luc, after wiping his sword, stood quietly by, watching the changes that came over the face of the dying man.

"Ah! you have killed me, monsieur," said Monsoreau.

"I did my best to do so," answered Saint-Luc; "but now that I see you stretched there and on the point of death, devil

take me if I am not sorry for what I have done. I respect you, monsieur; you were horribly jealous, but you were a brave man."

And quite satisfied with this funeral oration, Saint-Luc knelt beside Monsoreau and said:

"Have you any last wishes you would like to mention? I give you my word as a gentleman that they shall be executed. I know from my own experience that, when a person is wounded, he is generally thirsty. Shall I get you something to drink?"

Monsoreau did not answer.

He had turned over with his face to the earth, biting the turf and writhing in his blood.

"Poor devil!" muttered Saint-Luc, rising. "O friendship, friendship, thou art an exacting divinity!"

Monsoreau opened his fading eyes, tried to raise his head, and fell back with a dismal groan.

"It's all over!" said Saint-Luc; "he is dead; no use thinking any more about it. It's easy enough saying: 'Think no more about it,' when you have killed a man. Not so easy forgetting it, though. Well, no one can say I have wasted my time in the country."

And, climbing over the wall again, he took his way to the castle through the park.

The first person he perceived was Diane; she was talking with her friend.

"How well black will become her!" said Saint-Luc.

Then approaching the two charming women:

"Excuse me, my dear madame," said he to Diane, "but will you allow me to say a few words in private to Madame de Saint-Luc?"

"Of course, my friend," answered Madame de Monsoreau. "I must go and see my father, who is in the library. When you have finished with M. de Saint-Luc," she added, addressing her friend, "please come and join me there."

"Yes, without fail," replied Jeanne.

And Diane left them, with a bow and a smile.

Husband and wife were alone.

"Why, what is the matter? Why this gloomy mien, husband mine?" asked Madame de Saint-Luc, looking at him merrily.

"Because I feel gloomy," answered Saint-Luc.



"I RESPECT YOU, MONSIEUR, YOU WERE HORRIBLY JEALOUS, BUT
YOU WERE A BRAVE MAN."

"What has happened?"

"Oh, an accident, unfortunately."

"To you?" inquired Jeanne, in alarm.

"Not exactly to me, but to a person who was with me?"

"Who is this person?"

"The person I was walking with."

"M. de Monsoreau?"

"Alas! yes. Poor dear man!"

"What has happened to him?"

"I believe he's dead."

"Dead!" cried Jeanne, with very natural agitation, "dead!"

"That's the state of the case."

"He who was here awhile ago, talking and looking round him" —

"Ah, that was just the cause of his death; he looked round him too much, but, above all, he talked too much."

"Saint-Luc, my love," said the young woman, seizing both his hands.

"What's the matter?"

"You are hiding something from me."

"I? Nothing, I swear to you, not even the place where he lies."

"And where does he lie?"

"Yonder, behind the wall, near the spot where our friend Bussy is in the habit of tying his horse."

"Was it you that killed him, Saint-Luc?"

"Egad, I don't see who else it could be. There were only two of us; I am here safe and sound, and telling you that he is dead. I don't see that it is very hard to guess which of us two killed the other."

"Unhappy man, what have you done!"

"But, my darling," said Saint-Luc, "he challenged me; he was the first to draw the sword."

"It is frightful! frightful! the poor man!"

"Good," said Saint-Luc. "I was sure of it; before another week he will be called Saint Monsoreau."

"But you cannot stay here!" cried Jeanne. "You cannot dwell longer under the roof of the man you have slain."

"The very thing I said to myself, my dear, and so I ran here to ask you to get ready to leave."

"He has not wounded you, I hope?"

"Many thanks! Your question comes a little late; the

interest in me manifested by it, however, restores harmony between us; no, I am uninjured."

"So we are to start, then?"

"As soon as possible, for you understand the accident may be discovered at any moment."

"And what an accident!" cried Madame de Saint-Luc, who could not get the thought of this catastrophe out of her mind.

"Alas!" murmured Saint-Luc.

"But, now I think of it," said Jeanne, "Madame de Monsoreau is a widow."

"Just the very thing I was saying to myself awhile ago."

"After you killed him?"

"No, before."

"Well, well, while I am breaking the news to her" —

"Break it very gently, my darling; spare her conjugal susceptibilities."

"You wicked man! Well, while I am telling her, do you saddle the horses yourself as if for an ordinary ride."

"An excellent idea. You must manage to get hold of many others, for I confess this head of mine is growing just a bit muddled."

"But where are we to go?"

"To Paris."

"Paris! What about the King?"

"The King has forgotten everything by this time; too many important events have happened since then for him to remember our little escapade; besides, if there is war, as is probable, my place is at his side."

"Very well; let us set out for Paris, then."

"Of course; but I want a pen and ink."

"Whom are you writing to?"

"Bussy; you understand I can't very well quit Anjou in this fashion without telling him the reason."

"You are right; you'll find what you need in my chamber."

Saint-Luc went upstairs, and, with a hand which all his efforts could not keep from trembling, he wrote hastily the following lines:

"Dear Friend: You will learn ere long by the voice of rumor of the accident that has befallen M. de Monsoreau; we had a discussion together, close by the old thicket, on the causes and effects of dilapidated walls, and on the inconvenience produced by horses that travel home without a rider.

"In the heat of the argument, M. de Monsoreau fell upon a bed of poppies and dandelions, and had such a hard fall that he is now as dead as a door nail.

"Your friend for life,

"SAINT-LUC.

"P.S. — As this accident might seem to you, at first sight, somewhat improbable, I had better add that, when the accident occurred, each of us held a sword in his hand.

"I am starting for Paris immediately to make my peace with the King, as these quarters do not seem to me very safe after what has taken place."

Ten minutes later, one of the baron's servants set off for Angers with this letter, while M. and Madame de Saint-Luc left the park by a small gate opening on a cross-road. Diane was in tears at their departure, and very much at a loss, besides, how to relate to her father the sad catastrophe that had just happened.

She had turned away her eyes from Saint-Luc when he approached her.

"The way your friends always treat you if you do them a service," said Saint-Luc afterward to his wife. "Decidedly, there is no gratitude in the world. I happen to be the only person in it who is grateful."

CHAPTER LXVII.

IN WHICH THE QUEEN MOTHER ENTERS ANGERS, BUT NOT IN A VERY TRIUMPHANT FASHION.

ALMOST at the very moment when M. de Monsoreau fell beneath the sword of Saint-Luc, a loud flourish of trumpets sounded before the gates of Angers, which, as we know, were always kept carefully closed.

The guards, who had received previous notice, hoisted the standard and responded with an equally harmonious blast.

Catharine de Medicis was about to enter the city, followed by an imposing train of attendants.

Bussy was at once informed of her arrival; he rose from bed and went to notify the prince, who straightway got into his.

Certainly, the music played by the Angevine trumpets was very fine music, but it had none of that power which levelled the walls of Jericho; the gates of Angers did not open.

Catharine leaned out of the litter so that the guards could see her, expecting that the majesty of a royal countenance would be more effective than the sound of trumpets.

They looked at the queen, even saluted her courteously, but the gates remained closed.

Catharine sent one of her gentlemen to the barriers. He was treated with the utmost politeness.

But when he demanded that the gates should be thrown open for the queen mother, and that her majesty should be received with all due honor, he was told that Angers was a military fortress and its gates could not be opened until certain indispensable formalities were complied with.

The gentleman returned, very crestfallen, to his mistress, and then there dropped from the lips of Catharine, in all the bitterness of their significance, in all the fulness of their meaning, the words which Louis XIV. was to use later on, slightly modified to suit the altered condition of the royal authority :

“ I am kept waiting ! ” she murmured.

And the gentlemen who were beside her trembled.

At length, Bussy, who had been lecturing the duke for half an hour and laying before him a multitude of state reasons, all in favor of the policy he wished him to adopt, — Bussy, we say, came to a decision on his own account.

He had his horse saddled and magnificently caparisoned, selected five gentlemen he knew to be particularly odious to the queen mother, and advanced slowly at their head to meet her majesty.

Catharine was beginning to grow tired, not of waiting, but of devising schemes to avenge the slight of which she was the victim.

She recalled the Arabian story of the rebellious genius, imprisoned in a copper vase, who promised to enrich any one restoring him to freedom, but who, in his rage at having to wait ten centuries for his release, swore then to kill any one rash enough to break the cover.

Catharine's frame of mind was now somewhat similar.

She had intended to be very gracious to the gentlemen who, she believed, would eagerly come to greet her.

Then she made a vow to crush with her wrath the first of them who approached her.

Bussy, in all the trappings of war, appeared at the barrier, and looked vaguely before him, like some nocturnal sentry who listens rather than sees.

“Who goes there?” he cried.

Catharine had expected some show of respect, at the very least; her gentleman-in-waiting looked at her to learn her wishes.

“Go,” said she, “go again to the barrier; I hear some one crying: ‘Who goes there?’ Answer him, monsieur, — it is a mere formality.”

The gentleman proceeded to the porteouillis.

“It is the queen mother,” said he, “who has come to visit the good city of Angers.”

“Very well, monsieur,” answered Bussy; “be so kind as to turn to the left; about eighty yards from here you will find the postern!”

“The postern!” cried the gentleman. “the postern! A postern for her majesty!”

Bussy was no longer there to hear.

With his friends, who were laughing in their sleeves, he advanced to the spot where he had said the queen mother could enter.

“Did your majesty hear him?” asked the gentleman. “The postern” —

“Oh, yes, I heard; let us enter by the postern, since it is the path pointed out to us.”

And she flashed a glance at her attendant that made him turn pale; he knew his ill-timed remark had added to the humiliation imposed on his sovereign.

The queen mother and her retinue turned to the left, and the postern was opened.

Bussy advanced on foot, with sword in hand, beyond the gate, and bowed respectfully to Catharine; the plumes of his companions swept the ground.

“Your majesty,” said he, “is welcome to Angers.”

But neither did the drummers who were with him beat their drums, nor did his halberdiers present arms.

The queen descended from her litter and leaning on the arm of a gentleman of her suite, walked to the little gate, merely saying:

"Thanks, M. de Bussy."

This was all that came, at present, of the meditations she had been given such a length of time to make.

She marched along with head erect.

Bussy uttered a word of warning and even took hold of her arm.

"Ah! take care, madame," said he, "the door is very low; your majesty might get hurt."

"I must stoop, then?" answered the queen. "I hardly know how to do so; it is the first time I entered a city in this fashion."

These words, though spoken perfectly naturally, had a significance and far-reaching import in the eyes of many present — Angevines as well as sagacious courtiers — that aroused some little alarm; even Bussy twitched his mustache and turned away his eyes.

"You have gone too far," whispered Livarot in his ear.

"Pshaw!" answered Bussy. "she'll have to put up with a good many more experiences of the same sort."

The litter was hoisted over the wall by ropes and pulleys, and Catharine was enabled to proceed in it to the palace. Bussy and his friends got on horseback and rode on each side of the litter.

"My son!" suddenly exclaimed the queen mother; "I do not see my son, M. d'Anjou?"

These words, which she would have wished to leave unspoken, were wrung from her by the rage she could not control. The absence of François at such a moment put the finishing touch on the insults she had received.

"Monseigneur is ill and in bed, madame," said Bussy; "if it were not so, your majesty is well aware his highness would have been the first to meet you and do the honors of *his* city."

And now the hypocrisy of Catharine was sublime.

"Ill! my poor child ill!" she cried. "Ah! gentlemen, let us get on quickly. I hope he is, at least, well cared for."

"We do our best," answered Bussy, staring at her in surprise, as if he would know whether this woman had really a mother's heart.

"Is he aware that I am here?" resumed Catharine, after a silence she had usefully employed in scanning the faces of all the gentlemen present.

"Yes, madame, yes, certainly."

Catharine pinched her lips.

"He must be very sick, then," she added, pityingly.

"Awfully sick, indeed," answered Bussy. "His highness is subject to these sudden indispositions."

"It was a sudden attack, was it, M. de Bussy?"

"Undoubtedly, madame."

In this way they reached the palace, between two long lines of spectators, massed on each side of the litter.

Bussy made his way to the duke with such speed that when he entered the bedroom he was out of breath.

"She is here," said he. "Look out" —

"She is furious, then?"

"Yes, she is rather in a temper."

"Does she complain?"

"No, much worse; she smiles."

"How did the people receive her?"

"The people were as still as a post; they stared at this woman in dumb terror; they may not know her, but their instinct tells them what she is."

"And she?"

"Sent them kisses, all the time biting the tips of her fingers."

"The devil!"

"The devil: yes, you're right, monseigneur. You know now with whom the game is to be played; play it cunningly."

"It will be war between us, will it not?"

"Yes, with the odds against you. Ask a hundred to get ten, and, with her, you may thank your stars if you get five."

"Pshaw! you think me so weak, then, do you? Are you all there? Why has not Monsoreau returned?" asked the duke.

"I suppose he is at Méridor — Oh, we can do very well without him."

"Her majesty the queen mother!" cried the usher, at the threshold of the apartment.

And Catharine appeared at the same moment, looking pale, and dressed in black, according to her custom.

The duke made a movement to rise. But Catharine, with an agility hardly to be expected from a woman of her age, flung herself into her son's arms and covered his face with kisses.

"She will stifle him," thought Bussy, "and, *mordieu!* they are real kisses!"

She did more, she wept.

"We had better be on our guard," said Antraguët to Bussy ;
"every tear will be paid for by a hogshead of blood."

When she had finished her embraces Catharine sat down by the duke's pillow, and Bussy made a sign to his companions to withdraw. As for himself, he acted as if he were at home, leaned against one of the bedposts, and listened tranquilly.

"Would you not be kind enough to look after my poor attendants, my dear M. de Bussy?" said Catharine, abruptly.
"Next to our son, you are our dearest friend ; and you are quite familiar with the palace, are you not ? You will, then, I am sure, do me this favor."

It was impossible not to obey.

"Caught !" said Bussy to himself.

"Madame," he answered, "I am only too happy to do anything for your majesty, and so I take my leave."

Then he added, in his own mind :

"You are not as well acquainted with the doors here as you are with those of the Louvre ; I'll return."

And he passed out, unable to make even a sign to the duke. Catharine distrusted him, and so never took her eyes off him for a moment.

Catharine tried first to find out if her son was really sick or only pretending to be so.

She would base all her diplomatic operations on the result of her discoveries.

But François, as was to be expected from his mother's son, played his part to perfection.

She had wept ; he was in a burning fever.

Catharine was deceived ; she believed him really ill, and hoped to have more influence over a mind enfeebled by sufferings.

Her marks of tender affection for the duke became more numerous than ever ; she embraced him anew and wept so freely that François was amazed and inquired the cause of her emotion.

"You have run so great a risk, my child," she answered.

"While escaping from the Louvre, mother ?"

"Oh, no ; after you had escaped."

"How is that ?"

"Those who aided you in this unhappy flight" —

"Well ?"

"Were your most bitter enemies."

"She knows nothing," he thought, "but she would like to know."

"The King of Navarre," she broke out, bluntly, "the eternal scourge of our race — oh! I was well aware it was he."

"Ah!" said François to himself; "so she knows."

"Do you know," said she, "that he boasts of it, and believes that he will now carry all before him?"

"It is impossible, mother," he answered; "some one has been practising on your credulity."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because he had nothing to do with my escape, and, even though he had, I am perfectly safe, as you see — I have not met the King of Navarre for two years."

"That is not the only danger I want to speak to you about, my son," said Catharine, feeling that the stroke had not told.

"And what is the other one, mother?" he replied, directing a glance frequently at the tapestry in front of the alcove behind the queen, which was shaking.

Catharine approached François, and, in tones she intended should inspire him with terror:

"The King's anger!" said she, "the furious anger that now threatens you."

"Oh, that danger," he answered, "is pretty much on a level with the other, madame; I have no doubt my brother is in a furious rage; but I am safe."

"You really believe that?" said she, in a voice calculated to intimidate the boldest.

The tapestry trembled.

"I am sure of it," said the duke; "the more so, my kind mother, that you yourself have come hither to warn me of it."

"Why so?" asked Catharine, disturbed by the prince's calmness.

"Because," said he, after another look at the tapestry, "if you had been charged only with threats you would not have come, and the King, in that case, would have hesitated before he placed such a hostage as your majesty in my power."

Catharine raised her head, alarmed.

"I a hostage!" she exclaimed.

"The most sacred and venerable of all hostages," he answered with a smile, kissing her hand, and directing another triumphant glance at the tapestry.

Catharine dropped her arms by her side, completely overwhelmed; she could not guess that Bussy was watching his master through a secret and partly open door, holding him in check under her very eyes, and, almost ever since the conversation had opened, quickening his courage whenever he showed signs of faltering.

"My son," said she, at length, "you are quite right; my message to you is a message of peace."

"I will listen, mother," said François; "with all the respect I am in the habit of showing for every word you utter; I think it looks as if we were beginning to understand each other."

CHAPTER LXVIII.

GREAT ISSUES OFTEN HAVE SMALL CAUSES.

It was evident to Catharine that her efforts so far had been abortive.

Her discomfiture was so unexpected and, above all, so different from anything in her experience, that she wondered if her son could be as firm in his refusal as he seemed, when a quite trivial incident suddenly changed the aspect of affairs.

We have seen battles that were almost lost won by a change in the direction of the wind, and *vice versa*: Marengo and Waterloo are cases in point.

A grain of sand can alter the working of the most powerful machine.

Bussy, as we have mentioned already, was stationed in a secret lobby running into the Duc d'Anjou's alcove, and so placed that he could be seen only by the prince; from his hiding-place he thrust his head out through a slit in the tapestry whenever a word was uttered that appeared dangerous to his cause.

His cause, as must be already plain to the reader, was war at any price. He had to stop in Anjou as long as M. de Monsoreau remained there, so as to be in a position to watch the husband and visit the wife.

Notwithstanding the extreme simplicity of this policy of his, it unsettled the entire policy of France to an extraordinary degree; great issues often have small causes.

This was the reason why Bussy, with many a wink and many a furious grimace, and swaggering gestures and terrific frowns, was inciting his master to assume an attitude of positive truculence.

The duke, who was afraid of Bussy, allowed himself to be incited, and, as we have seen, no one could have been more truculent with a mother than he was with Catharine.

Catharine was, then, beaten at all points, and was thinking only of effecting an honorable retreat, when a trifling occurrence, almost as unlooked for as the Duc d'Anjou's obstinacy, came to her rescue.

Suddenly, just at the most racy part of the conversation between mother and son, just when the Duc d'Anjou was exhibiting the most stubbornness, Bussy felt some one pulling at his cloak.

Anxious not to lose a word of the dialogue, he stretched his hand round to the place where he experienced the tugging, and, without ever turning, caught a fist; travelling up further, he discovered an arm, after the arm a shoulder, and after the shoulder a man.

Seeing then that the matter was worth attending to, he turned round.

The man was Rémy.

Bussy was going to speak, but Rémy laid a finger on his lips, and gently drew his master into the adjoining chamber.

"What is the matter, Rémy?" asked the count, impatiently, "and why do you disturb me at such a moment?"

"A letter," said Rémy, in a low voice.

"The devil take you! For a mere letter you drag me away from a colloquy as important as the one I and the Duc d'Anjou have just been having together!"

Rémy was not at all put out by this sally.

"There are letters and letters," said he.

"He's sure to have a reason for what he does," thought Bussy. "Where does this come from?" he asked.

"From Méridor."

"Ah!" cried Bussy, eagerly; "from Méridor! Thanks, my dear Rémy, thanks!"

"I have not done wrong, then?"

"As if you ever did wrong! Where is the letter?"

"Ah, that is the very thing that led me to think it of the highest importance; the messenger will give it to none but you."

"He is right. Is he here?"

"Yes."

"Bring him in."

Rémy opened the door and beckoned to a man that looked like a groom to enter.

"This is M. de Bussy," said he, pointing to the count.

"Give it to me," said Bussy; "I am the person you are looking for," and he handed him a demi-pistole.

"Oh, I know you well," said the groom, giving him the letter.

"Was it from her you received it?"

"No, not from her, but from him."

"Whom do you mean by him?" asked Bussy, glancing at the address.

"M. de Saint-Luc."

"Ah! ah!"

Bussy had become slightly pale, for at the words "but from him" he fancied the letter might have come from the husband and not from the wife, and the mere thought of Monsoreau had the curious effect of making Bussy change color.

Bussy turned round to read, and to hide, while reading, that emotion which every one must manifest on the receipt of an important letter, unless he be Caesar Borgia, Machiavelli, Catharine de Médicis, or the devil.

Our poor Bussy did right to turn round, for, before he had finished the letter, with which our readers are already acquainted, the blood surged to his temples and into his eyes like a storm-driven sea; from pale he became purple, was for a moment stunned, and, feeling that he should fall, he tottered to an arm-chair near the window and sank into it.

"Go away," said Rémy to the groom, who was quite bewildered by the effect produced by the letter he had brought.

Rémy pushed him outside, and then the messenger took to his heels; he felt the news in the letter was bad, and feared he might be asked to surrender the money he had just received.

Rémy returned to the count and shook his arm.

"*Mordieu!*" cried he, "answer me on the instant, or by Saint Æsculapius, I'll bleed every limb in your body!"

Bussy looked up. He was no longer red, he was no longer dazed; but he was very gloomy.

"Look," said he, "at what Saint-Luc has done for me."

And he handed Rémy the letter.

Rémy read eagerly.

"Well," he replied, "all this strikes me as very fine. M. de Saint-Luc is a gallant man. I rather like people who expedite the passage of a soul to purgatory in this fashion."

"It is incredible!" stammered Bussy.

"Certainly, it is incredible; but that has nothing to do with the question. This is how we stand now: in nine months I'll have a Comtesse de Bussy for my patient. *Mordieu!* have no fear; as an accoucheur I'm a match for Ambroise Paré himself."

"Yes," said Bussy; "she shall be my wife."

"I don't see that there can be much trouble about that; she is a good deal more your wife now than she has ever been her husband's."

"Monsoreau dead!"

"Dead!" repeated Le Haudouin; "it was his fate."

"Oh, it seems to me, Rémy, as if I were in a dream. What! never again to behold the spectre that was always coming between me and happiness. Oh, Rémy, we must be mistaken."

"Not the least in the world. *Mordieu* — read the letter again: 'fell upon a bed of poppies and dandelions' — see! — 'had such a hard fall that he is now dead' — see! — I have often noticed that it is a very dangerous thing to fall on poppies; but I used to be under the impression formerly that only women were exposed to this peril."

"But," said Bussy, who paid very little attention to the quips of his companion, and was trying to pursue his own thoughts through the turns and windings of their complicated course, "Diane cannot remain at Méridor. I do not wish it. She must go somewhere else, somewhere where she can forget."

"I don't know a better place than Paris," answered Le Haudouin; "no place in the world where you forget more easily than Paris."

"You are right. She can occupy her little house in the Rue des Tournelles, and we'll spend the ten months of her widowhood there in close retirement, that is, if it be possible for happiness to remain concealed from public eyes. Then, the morning of the celebration of our marriage will be but the renewal of the bliss of the evening before."

"I agree with you," said Rémy; "but, in order to be able to go to Paris" —

“ Well ? ”

“ One thing is necessary.”

“ What is it ? ”

“ Peace in Anjou.”

“ True,” answered Bussy, “ nothing truer. Great heavens ! what a lot of time lost, and lost uselessly ! ”

“ Which means that you are going to get on horseback and ride to Méridor.”

“ No, no, not I, but you. I cannot possibly leave here at present. Besides, at such a time, my presence would be almost improper.”

“ Where am I to see her ? Shall I go to the castle ? ”

“ No ; go first to the old thicket ; she may be walking there, in expectation of my arrival. Then, if you perceive no sign of her, proceed to the castle.”

“ What shall I tell her ? ”

“ Tell her I’m half mad.”

And pressing the hand of the young man upon whom his experience had taught him to rely as if he were a second self, he hurried to resume his place in the corridor at the entrance to the alcove behind the tapestry.

During Bussy’s absence Catharine had been endeavoring to regain the ground his presence had caused her to lose.

“ My son,” she had said, “ I will never believe that a mother and son can fail to understand each other.”

“ Still, you see,” was the duke’s answer, “ that such a thing sometimes happens.”

“ Never, when she wishes it.”

“ You mean, madame, when they wish it,” retorted the prince, quite proud of his courage and looking at the alcove in the expectation of being rewarded by an approving glance from Bussy.

“ But I wish it ! ” cried Catharine ; “ surely, François, that must be clear to you ! — I wish it.”

And the tone of her voice contrasted with her words ; the words were imperious, the voice was almost suppliant.

“ You wish it ? ” replied the Duc d’Anjou, with a smile.

“ Yes,” said Catharine, “ I wish it and I am ready to make any sacrifice to achieve this object.”

“ Ah ! ” muttered François, “ the devil you will ! ”

“ Yes, my dear child, say what you want, what you require. Speak ! — command ! ”

"Oh! mother!" said François, almost embarrassed at a victory so complete that it left him no opportunity to act as an unrelenting conqueror.

"Listen, my son," began Catharine, in her most caressing voice, "you would not drown a kingdom in blood, would you? Oh, that is not possible. You are neither a bad Frenchman nor a bad brother."

"My brother insulted me, madame, and I owe him nothing, either as my brother or my king."

"But I, François, I! You have nothing to complain of in my regard?"

"Yes, madame, for you abandoned me!" returned the duke, thinking that Bussy was still in his place and could hear him as before.

"Ah! you wish to kill me, then?" said Catharine, dejectedly. "Well, be it so! a mother had better die than live to witness her children murder each other."

It is hardly necessary to state that Catharine had not the least intention in the world of dying.

"Oh! do not say that, madame, you break my heart!" cried François, whose heart was as intact as it had ever been.

Catharine burst into tears.

The duke took her hands in his and tried to calm her, but not without many an anxious look in the direction of the alcove.

"But what do you want?" said she; "at least, state your wishes, that we may know where we stand."

"What do you want of me yourself, mother? Come, now, mother," said François; "speak out; I am willing to listen."

"I want you to return to Paris, my dear child; I want you to return to the court of the King, your brother, who will receive you with open arms."

"Ah! madame, I can see things clearly enough. I rather think that, if I took your advice, it is the Bastile and not my brother that would receive me with open arms."

"No, return, return, and upon my honor, upon my love as a mother, nay, I swear it upon the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord"—and here Catharine made the sign of the cross—"that you shall be received by the King as though you were king and he the Duc d'Anjou."

The duke's eyes were fixed obstinately on the tapestry.

"Accept, my son," continued Catharine, "you shall receive

additional appanages; tell me, would you like to have guards?"

"Oh, madame, your son has given me guards already, guards of honor even, since those chosen by him were his four minions."

"Now, now, my son, do not answer me thus; the guards he will give you shall be chosen by yourself, and their captain, should you desire it, shall be M. de Bussy."

The duke, staggered by this offer, which he thought must also have its effect on Bussy, looked again at the alcove, expecting, with some trepidation, to encounter the flaming eyes of his follower, who was certain to be gnashing his white teeth in his excitement.

But — wonder of wonders! — Bussy was there, sure enough; but Bussy smiling and joyous. Bussy nodding his head every second in approval.

"What does this mean?" he asked; "did Bussy favor a war only that he might become captain of my guards?"

"Then," said he aloud, but as if communing with himself, "ought I to accept?"

"Yes! yes!" was Bussy's answer, given with hands and shoulders and head.

"In that case," continued the duke, "should I leave Anjou and return to Paris?"

"Yes! yes! yes!" went on Bussy, who was becoming more and more frantic in his gestures of assent.

"Why, my dear child," said Catharine, "you cannot find it very unpleasant to return to Paris?"

"Upon my faith," said the duke to himself, "it's all a mystery. It was agreed between us that I should make no concession, and here now he's all for peace and reconciliation."

"Well!" asked Catharine, anxiously, "what is your answer?"

"Mother," replied the duke, who desired to know Bussy's reason for backing out in this fashion, "I will reflect, and to-morrow" —

"He surrenders," thought Catharine. "I have won the battle."

"After all," said the prince to himself, "perhaps Bussy is right."

And, with another embrace, mother and son separated.

CHAPTER LXIX.

HOW MONSOREAU OPENED AND SHUT HIS EYES AND OPENED THEM AGAIN, THEREBY PROVING HE WAS NOT DEAD.

SWEET it is to have a true friend, the sweeter because true friends are so rare.

So thought Rémy as he galloped across the country on one of the best mounts in the prince's stables.

He would have liked to have taken Roland, but M. de Monsoreau had a prior claim to the animal, and so he was forced to select another.

"I am very fond of M. de Bussy," said he to himself, "and I believe M. de Bussy is very fond of me also. The thought of this gives me such a pleasant sensation to-day that I feel as if I had happiness enough for two."

Then he added, after a deep respiration :

"Really, I'm beginning to think my heart is no longer large enough for my body."

"And now," he continued, "in what style am I to address Madame Diane ?

"If she be ceremonious, solemn, gloomy : mute salutations, obsequious bows, a hand laid on the heart ; if she smile, I must make a leg, indulge in a few pirouettes, and execute a polonaise all by myself alone.

"If M. de Saint-Luc be still in the castle, of which I am in doubt, he will not object to a mild hurrah ; or a thanksgiving, in Latin, of course, might not be distasteful. I am rather inclined to think he will not suffer from lowness of spirits —

"Ah ! I'm near the spot."

In fact, the horse, after turning to the left and then to the right, and after following the flowery lane with which we are acquainted, had entered the grove that stood in front of the Méridor park wall.

"What a profusion of beautiful poppies everywhere !" said Rémy. "That reminds me of our grand huntsman. Poor dear man ! I'll wager the ones he fell on were not finer than these."

Rémy came closer to the wall.

Suddenly his horse stopped, with nostrils distended and eyes staring fixedly.

Rémy, who was going very fast, and was not expecting a

halt, had a very narrow escape from being thrown over the head of Mithridate.

For this was the name of the steed that had taken Roland's place.

Rémy, who, from practice, had grown to be a fearless horseman, plunged his spurs deep into the animal's flanks; but Mithridate did not budge; he had doubtless got his name from the many points of resemblance between him and the stubborn king of Pontus.

Le Handouin, in amazement, examined the ground to find out the obstacle that caused his horse to behave in such a manner; all he saw was a wide pool of blood which the earth and the flowers were gradually drinking.

"Ah!" he cried, "I wonder was it here that Saint-Luc ran Monsoreau through with his sword."

Rémy raised his eyes and looked round him.

Ten yards away, under a clump of trees, he perceived two legs that seemed already stiff and a body that looked stiffer still.

The legs were stretched out to their full length; the body was lying against the wall.

"Ha! Monsoreau himself!" muttered Rémy. "*Hic obiit Nimrod*. Hum! if the widow leaves him in this way to the ravens and vultures, it is a good sign for us. I rather think the accompaniment to my funeral oration will be the pirouettes, and I shall have to make a leg and dance the polonaise."

And Rémy, after alighting, advanced a few steps in the direction of the body.

"Queer!" said he, "the man is dead, dead as a herring, and he is here, while his blood is over yonder. Ah! there is the track. He must have crawled hither from down there, or perhaps that good-natured Saint-Luc, who is charity itself, propped him up against the wall so that the blood might not fly to his head. Yes, that's it, and so he died with his eyes open and without any distortion of his features. Yes; he is dead, dead beyond yea or nay."

And Rémy touched the wound with his finger.

Then he recoiled, struck dumb with horror: the two eyes which he had seen open closed, and a pallor more livid than that which had first struck him spread over the face before him.

Rémy himself became almost as pale as Monsoreau, but, as

he was a doctor, that is to say, something of a materialist, he muttered, while scratching the end of his nose :

"*Credere portentis mediocre.* If he closed his eyes, he did so because he is n't dead."

And as, in spite of his materialism, the situation was disagreeable, and as the joints of his knees betrayed a greater weakness than was pleasant, he sat down, or rather dropped down, at the foot of the tree against which he was leaning, and found himself face to face with the corpse.

"I have read somewhere, I don't know very well where," said he, "of certain pulsatory phenomena which are really only evidence of the subsidence of matter; in other words, of the beginning of corruption. This devil of a man must trouble us even after his death! Yes, faith, his eyes are shut and shut fast, but yet the pallor has increased, *chroma chloron*, as Galen says; *color albus*, according to Cicero, who was a very clever orator. However, there is one way of ascertaining whether he is dead or whether he is not, and that is to give him six inches of my sword in the stomach; if he does not move then, that will be proof positive he's dead."

And Rémy was preparing to make this charitable experiment — he had, in fact, his hand on his sword — when the eyes of Monsoreau opened anew. This second incident produced on Rémy an effect quite different from that of the first. He jumped up as if moved by a spring, and a cold sweat bathed his forehead.

This time the eyes of the dead man remained wide open.

"He is not dead," murmured Rémy, "he is not dead. Egad! this is a pretty state of things for us!"

Then a thought naturally occurred to the young man.

"He is alive; no doubt," said he, "but if I kill him, he'll be dead for sure."

And he stared at Monsoreau, who stared at him in turn with such terrified eyes that it almost seemed as if he could read what was passing through the physician's soul.

"Faugh!" cried Rémy, suddenly, "faugh! what a hideous thought! God is my witness that, if he stood there before me, sword in hand and firm on his feet, I would kill him with the sincerest pleasure. But if I were to do so now when he is helpless and almost dead, it would be worse than a crime, it would be an infamy."

"Help!" murmured Monsoreau, "help! I am dying."

"*Mordieu!*" said Rémy. "my position is embarrassing. I am a doctor, and, consequently, it is my duty to succor my fellow-men when they need my aid. It is true this Monsoreau is so ugly that I might almost be justified in denying that he is a fellow-creature of mine, but he is of the same species, *genus homo*. Well, well, I must forget that my name is Le Haudouin, Bussy's friend; I must only remember that I am a physician."

"Help!" repeated the wounded man.

"I am here," said Rémy.

"Go and get me a priest and a doctor."

"The doctor is found already, and perhaps he will enable you to do without the priest."

"Le Haudouin!" murmured M. de Monsoreau, recognizing Rémy, "by what chance" —

As will be seen, M. de Monsoreau was still faithful to his character; even in his agony he showed distrust and asked questions.

Rémy understood the full import of this inquiry.

This wood was no public thoroughfare, and no one was likely to be there except he had particular business; the question was, then, almost natural.

"How came you here?" asked Monsoreau anew, his suspicions lending him a little strength.

"Why," answered Le Haudouin, "because I met M. de Saint-Luc about three miles away."

"Ah! my murderer," stammered Monsoreau, turning pale with anger as well as pain.

"He said to me: 'Rémy, run to a part of the wood called the old thicket; there you will find a man dead.'"

"Dead!" repeated Monsoreau.

"Hang it! he believed you were, so you needn't be angry with him for that; then I came, I saw, and you were conquered."

"And now tell me — you are speaking to a man, do not be afraid of speaking frankly — tell me am I mortally wounded?"

"Ah, the devil! you ask a question not so easily answered," said Rémy. "However, I'll try to do so; let us see."

As we have said, the conscience of the doctor had got the better of the devotion of the friend.

Rémy approached Monsoreau, then, and with all the usual precautions removed his cloak, doublet, and shirt.

The sword had penetrated the chest between the sixth and seventh ribs.

"Hum!" said Rémy, "do you suffer much?"

"Not in the breast, but in the back."

"Ah, let me see," asked Rémy; "in what part of the back?"

"Below the shoulder-bone."

"The blade encountered a bone," observed Rémy; "hence the pain."

And he examined the spot where the count told him he suffered most.

"No," said the surgeon, "I was mistaken; the sword encountered nothing, and passed clean through. Upon my word, about as pretty a thrust as I have ever seen. There is a real pleasure in patching up the wounds made by M. de Saint-Luc; the sun actually shines through the hole he made in you, my dear M. de Monsoreau."

Monsoreau fainted, but Rémy was not disturbed by this weakness.

"Ah, that is well: syncope, low pulse, quite natural." He felt the hands and legs: "the extremities cold." He applied his ear to the chest: "absence of noisy respiration. The devil! I'm afraid Madame de Monsoreau won't be a widow long."

At this moment a slight reddish foam bathed the wounded man's lips.

Rémy quickly drew a surgeon's case from his pocket and took out a lancet; then he tore off a strip from his patient's shirt and bound it round his arm.

"Now we'll see," said he to himself. "If the blood flow, by my faith, it's unlikely that Madame Diane will be a widow; but if it do not flow — Ah! ah! it flows, *egal!* Forgive me, dear M. de Bussy, forgive me; but, faith, a doctor is a doctor before everything."

The blood, in fact, after, so to speak, hesitating for an instant, had spurted freely from the vein; and, almost at the same moment, the wounded man breathed and opened his eyes.

"Ah!" he stammered, "I thought all was over."

"Not yet, my dear monsieur, not yet; it is even possible" —

"That I may recover?"

"Mercy on us, yes! But let me first close the wound. Keep quiet; don't stir. You see, nature, at this moment, is

caring for you within, just as I am caring for you on the outside. I make the blood flow ; she stops it. Ah ! nature is a great surgeon, my dear monsieur, — stay, let me wipe your lips."

And Rémy passed a pocket handkerchief over the lips of the count.

"At first," said his patient, "I spat out a mouthful of blood."

"Well, you see now," answered Rémy, "that the hæmorrhage is already arrested. Capital ! So much the better — or rather, so much the worse !"

"What ! so much the worse !"

"So much the better for you, certainly ; but so much the worse ! I know what I mean. My dear M. de Monsoreau, I'm afraid I'm going to have the happiness of curing you."

"How is that ? You are afraid ?"

"Yes, I know what I am saying."

"You think, then, I shall recover ?"

"Alas !"

"You are a rather strange sort of doctor, M. Rémy."

"What does that matter to you, if I save you. Now, let me see" —

Rémy had just stopped the bleeding. He rose.

"You are not going to forsake me now ?" said the count.

"Ah ! you talk too much, my dear monsieur. Too much talking is hurtful. If that were the case," muttered Le Haudouin to himself, "I should rather advise him to cry aloud."

"I do not understand you."

"That 's lucky. Now your wound is dressed."

"Well ?"

"Well, I am going to the castle to fetch help."

"And what am I to do during the time ?"

"Keep quiet, do not stir, breathe very gently, and try to avoid coughing. Which is the nearest house ?"

"The Castle of Méridor."

"How do you go there ?" asked Rémy, affecting the most profound ignorance.

"You can climb over the wall, and then you will be in the park ; or you can follow the park wall until you come to the gate."

"Very well ; so I am off."

"Thanks, generous man!"

"If you knew how exceeding generous I am," stammered Rémy, "you would be even more thankful still."

And, mounting his horse, he galloped in the direction pointed out by the count.

In about five minutes he was at the castle; all its tenants, as bustling and excited as ants whose dwelling has been violated, were searching thickets, clearings, every sort of out of the way place, for the body of their master, but, so far, in vain. This was the fault of Saint-Luc who, to gain time, had left directions that led them astray.

Rémy fell among them like a thunderbolt and carried them off with him.

He was so eager to bring them to the rescue that Madame de Monsoreau could not help staring at him in wonder.

A secret, almost imperceptible thought crossed her mind, and in a second had tarnished the angelic purity of her soul.

"And I thought he was Bussy's friend!" she murmured, as Rémy disappeared, taking with him a handbarrow, lint, fresh water, and, in fact, all that was needed in the circumstances.

Æsculapius himself could not have used his divine wings to better purpose than Rémy used his legs.

CHAPTER LXX.

HOW THE DUC D'ANJOU WENT TO MÉRIDOR TO CONGRATULATE MADAME DE MONSOREAU ON THE DEATH OF HER HUSBAND, AND HOW HE WAS RECEIVED BY M. DE MONSOREAU.

As soon as the Duc d'Anjou had broken off his conversation with his mother, he hurried away in search of Bussy; he was eager to find out the reason for the astounding change in the count's opinions.

Bussy had gone to his lodgings and was there reading Saint-Luc's letter the fifth time, every line making a more and more pleasant impression on him after every reading.

Catharine, too, had retired to her apartments, had summoned her attendants thither, and ordered them to have everything in readiness for her departure, which she believed

she could arrange for the next day, or for the day after, at the latest.

Bussy received the prince with a charming smile.

"What, monseigneur," said he, "your highness deigns to visit my humble house?"

"Yes, *mordieu*!" answered the duke, "and I have come to ask you for an explanation."

"An explanation from me?"

"Yes, from you."

"I listen, monseigneur."

"How is this?" cried the duke; "you bid me to be armed from top to toe, so as to be proof against the demands of my mother, and to support the attack valiantly; I do so, and in the very heat of battle, at the very moment when every blow has failed to move me, you come and say: 'take off your armor, monseigneur, take it off.'"

"The advice I gave you, monseigneur, was entirely due to the fact that I was ignorant of the purpose of Madame Catharine's visit. Now that I see she has come to advance your highness's glory and honor" —

"Advance my glory and honor! Well, that was the very subject I was to have your opinion on. What do you think of the business?"

"Well, what does your highness want? Let us look at the matter calmly. You want to triumph over your enemies, do you not? I do not, like certain persons, imagine that you want to become king of France."

The duke looked at Bussy sourly.

"There may be some who would advise you to try to do so, but, believe me, they are your worst enemies. If they are resolute and obstinate in this notion of theirs and you cannot get rid of them, send them to me; I will show them how absurd they are."

The duke frowned.

"Besides, examine into the matter yourself, monseigneur," continued Bussy, "fathom your own heart, as, I think, the Bible says; have you a hundred thousand men, ten million of livres, alliances with foreign powers, and, above all, would you turn against your King?"

"My King was not at all backward in turning against me," said the duke.

"Oh, if you take that ground, you are in the right. Well,

then, put forward your claims, get yourself crowned, and assume the title of king of France. Nothing could please me better than your success, for, if you grow great, I grow great along with you."

"Who talks of being king of France?" retorted the prince, bitterly. "You are discussing a question I have never asked any one to answer, not even myself."

"Well, then, that point is settled, monseigneur, and there is no dispute between us, since we are agreed on the main subject."

"We are agreed, you say?"

"At least, so it seems to me. Make them give you a guard and five hundred thousand livres. Before peace is signed, demand a subsidy from Anjou to carry on the war. Once you have it, you can keep it, it does n't bind you to anything. In this fashion, we shall have men, money, power, and we shall go — God knows where!"

"But once in Paris, once they have got hold of me, once they have me in their clutches, they can laugh at me."

"Oh, nonsense, monseigneur! Surely you have no such idea in your mind as that! Laugh at you, indeed! Did you not hear the queen mother's offer?"

"She offered a good many things."

"I understand; and that is what alarms you?"

"Yes."

"But, among them, she offered you a company of guards, though even that company were to be commanded by M. de Bussy."

"Undoubtedly, that was one of her offers."

"Then take my advice, accept; appoint Bussy your captain; Antragnet and Livarot your lieutenants; Ribeirac ensign. Give the four of us full liberty to make up the company just as we see fit; and then, take my word for it, with this escort at your heels, I'd like to see the man would laugh at you or fail to salute you as you pass, though he were the King himself."

"By my faith, I believe you're right, Bussy. I'll think of it."

"Yes, think of it, monseigneur."

"Of course. But, by the way, what was that you were reading so attentively when I entered?"

"Ah! excuse me, I was forgetting, — a letter."

"A letter?"

"Which must have as much interest for you as for me; what the devil was I thinking of not to show it to you at once!"

"It contains important news, then?"

"Great heavens! yes, and sad news as well. M. de Monsoreau is dead!"

"What's that you say?" cried the duke, starting back in amazement, though Bussy, who had his eyes fixed on the prince, fancied that he was quite as much delighted as surprised.

"He is dead, monseigneur."

"Dead! M. de Monsoreau?"

"Why, dear me, yes! are n't we all mortal?"

"Yes, but a person does n't die suddenly like that."

"That depends. Supposing you're killed?"

"Was he killed, then?"

"It would seem so."

"By whom?"

"By Saint-Luc, with whom he had a quarrel."

"Ah! dear Saint-Luc!" cried the prince.

"Hold!" said Bussy. "I was not aware that you and 'dear Saint-Luc' were such good friends."

"Saint-Luc is my brother's friend, and, now that we are reconciled, my brother's friends are mine," answered the duke.

"Capital!" said Bussy. "I am delighted, monseigneur, to find you in such an admirable frame of mind."

"And you are sure?"

"Faith, as sure as I can very well be so far. Here is Saint-Luc's note informing me of his death; but as I am as incredulous as you are and not at all certain yet, I have sent my surgeon Rémy to find out if the news be true, and, in case it is, to assure the old baron that I sympathize with his grief."

"Dead! Monsoreau dead!" repeated the Duc d'Anjou; "and died *quite alone*!"

The words escaped him unwittingly, just as *dear Saint-Luc* had escaped him. The unpremeditated naturalness of both exclamations was frightful.

"He did not die quite alone," said Bussy, "since Saint-Luc, who killed him, must have been with him."

"Oh, I know what I'm saying," answered the duke.

"Did your highness, might I ask, give orders to some one else to kill him?" inquired Bussy.

"No, upon my faith; did you?"

"I! Oh, monseigneur, I am not a great prince and cannot have that sort of job done for me by others; I am obliged to attend to such things myself."

"Ah! Monsoreau. Monsoreau!" muttered the prince, with his appalling smile.

"I say, monseigneur! it really looks as if you hated this poor count."

"No, it was you that hated him."

"Oh, it was quite natural I should hate him," said Bussy, who could not keep from blushing. "Have I not to thank him for the terrible humiliation your highness inflicted on me?"

"So you still remember that?"

"Good heavens! no, monseigneur, as you can see for yourself; but you, whose servant, friend, and creature" —

"Enough," said the prince, interrupting a conversation that threatened to become embarrassing; "order my horses to be saddled, Bussy."

"Your horses to be saddled, and why?"

"To go to Méridor; I wish to condole with Madame Diane on her loss. Besides, I have been intending to visit the family for some time, and I really do not know why I have not done so before; but I am determined not to delay any longer. *Corbleu!* I am not aware of any cause for it, but I never felt so much in the vein for paying compliments as I do to-day."

"By my soul," said Bussy to himself, "now that Monsoreau is dead and I have no longer any fear that he'll sell his wife to the duke, it don't much matter whether he see her again or not. If he attack her I will defend her, and that, too, without help from others. And, since this gives me an opportunity of seeing her again also, I don't see why I should n't profit by it."

And he went out to order the horses to be saddled.

A quarter of an hour later, while Catharine was sleeping, or pretending to sleep, with the object of recovering her strength after the fatigue of her journey, the prince, Bussy and ten gentlemen, mounted on fine horses, were riding to Méridor, all as light-hearted as youth, fine weather, and a stretch of flower-enamelled turf could render men as well as horses.

At sight of this magnificent cavalcade the porter of the castle came as far as the fosse to ask the visitors' names.

"The Duc d'Anjou!" cried the prince.

At once the porter seized a horn and blew a blast that brought all the servants running to the drawbridge.

There was soon heard the sound of steps hurrying to and fro and up and down in the halls and corridors and on the stairs; windows were opened; there was the noise of bolts and bars as the doors were unfastened, and the old baron appeared on the threshold, with the keys of his castle in his hand.

"It is wonderful how little Monsoreau is regretted!" said the duke; "see, Bussy, all those people look as if nothing had happened."

A woman appeared on the steps.

"Ah! the beautiful Diane!" cried the duke; "are you looking, Bussy, are you looking?"

"Yes, I see her, monseigneur," answered the young man; "but," he added, in a low voice, "I don't see Rémy."

Diane came outside the house, and, immediately behind her, came a litter in which lay Monsoreau, his eyes burning with fever or with jealousy; he was more like some Indian sultan on his palanquin than a corpse on his bier.

"Oh! ha! what does this mean?" cried the duke, addressing his companion, who had turned whiter than the handkerchief with which he was trying to conceal his emotion.

"Long live the Duc d'Anjou!" said Monsoreau, contriving by a violent effort to raise and wave his hand.

"Gently," said a voice behind him, "you will do yourself an injury."

It was Rémy, who, faithful to his duty as a doctor, was giving this prudent warning to his patient.

Astonishment does not last long among courtiers — on their faces, at least. The Duc d'Anjou at once took measures to dispel this general stupefaction and to substitute smiles in its place.

"Oh! my dear count," he cried, "what a happy surprise! Do you know, we were told you were dead?"

"Pray, come near me, your highness," said the wounded man, "let me kiss your highness's hand. Thank God! not only am I not dead, but I shall live, I hope, to serve you with more ardor and fidelity than ever."

As for Bussy, who was neither prince nor husband, two social positions in which dissimulation is absolutely necessary, a cold perspiration bathed his temples; he did not dare to look at Diane.

To see the treasure he had twice lost so near its owner made him feel sick.

"And you, M. de Bussy, who have come with his highness, will do me the favor to accept my sincerest thanks, for it is to you that I am almost wholly indebted for my life."

"What! to me!" stammered the young man, believing that the count was mocking him.

"Undoubtedly, though, it is true, indirectly; but my gratitude is not lessened by that. Ah! here is my saviour," he added, pointing to Rémy, who lifted his hands to heaven in despair and would gladly have sunk into the bowels of the earth. "My friends may thank him for having me still with them."

And, despite the signals made by the poor doctor for him to keep silent, signals he mistook for hygienic cautions, he lauded in the strongest terms the care, skill, and zeal lavished on him by Le Haudouin.

The duke's face grew dark, and the look that Bussy fastened on Rémy was terrible.

The poor fellow, half hidden behind Monsoreau, only answered with a gesture which meant:

"Alas! it is not my fault."

"By the way," continued the count, "I understand that Rémy found you dying on a certain day just as he found me. It is a bond of friendship between us, and you may rely on mine, M. de Bussy. When Monsoreau loves, he loves in good earnest; it is true that his hate is somewhat like his love, for when he hates, he hates heartily also."

Bussy thought he noticed that the flash that shot from the count's inflamed eyes, while uttering the last sentence, was aimed at the Duc d'Anjou.

The duke saw nothing.

"Come, then," said he, alighting from his horse and offering his hand to Diane, "have the goodness to do us the honors of your house, which we expected to find in mourning, but which, fortunately, continues to be the abode of happiness and bliss. As for you Monsoreau, rest; rest is absolutely necessary to the wounded."

"Monseigneur," said the count, "it shall never be said that while Monsoreau was alive he allowed any one but himself to do the honors of his house to your highness. My servants will carry me, and, wherever you go, I shall follow."

It really looked as if the duke had discovered the real thoughts of Monsoreau, for he suddenly dropped Diane's hand.

Then Monsoreau breathed freely.

"Go up to her," whispered Rémy in Bussy's ear.

Bussy approached Diane, and Monsoreau smiled on them both. Bussy took Diane's hand, and Monsoreau smiled again.

"This is a change indeed, M. le Comte," said Diane, in an undertone.

"Alas!" murmured Bussy. "why is it not greater?"

It is needless to state that the baron displayed all the pomp of his patriarchal hospitality toward the prince and the gentlemen who attended him.

CHAPTER LXXI.

THE INCONVENIENCE OF LITTERS THAT ARE TOO WIDE AND DOORS THAT ARE TOO NARROW.

Bussy remained by Diane's side; Monsoreau's benevolent smiles gave him an advantage which he was the last person in the world not to turn to account.

As jealous husbands are not sparing of hard knocks in defence of their property, they are not spared, either, when once the poachers get a foothold on their lands.

"Madame," said Bussy to Diane, "I am, in truth, the most miserable of men. On the news of his death I advised the prince to come to terms with his mother and return to Paris; he consented, and now you remain in Anjou."

"Oh! Louis," answered the young woman, smiling as she took his hand in her slender fingers, "how dare you say we are unfortunate? Do you forget all our happy days, all the ineffable delights the memory of which thrills my heart with ecstasy; do you forget them, then?"

"I forget nothing, madame; on the contrary, I only remember them too well, and that is why the loss of such bliss causes me such pangs. Think of it, madame! to return to Paris and live three hundred miles away from you! My heart is breaking, Diane, and I feel utterly forlorn."

Diane looked at Bussy; she saw such sorrow in his eyes that she dropped hers and began to reflect.

The young man waited a moment, gazing at her imploringly and with his hands clasped in entreaty.

"Well!" cried Diane, suddenly; "you will go to Paris, Louis, and I intend going also."

"What!" exclaimed the young man, "leave M. de Monsoreau!"

"Though I should leave him," answered Diane, "he would not leave me. No, Louis, believe me, it is much better he should come with us."

"Wounded, ill as he is; impossible!"

"He will come, I tell you."

And dropping Bussy's arm, she approached the prince; he was answering some questions of Monsoreau in a very surly manner; Ribeirac, Antraguët, and Livarot were with him and standing round the litter.

At sight of Diane, the count's face brightened; but his cheerfulness did not last long; it passed as rapidly as a gleam of sunshine between two storms.

When Diane came up close to the duke, the count frowned.

"Monseigneur," said she, with a charming smile, "I am told your highness is passionately fond of flowers. If you come with me I will show you the loveliest flowers in all Anjou."

François gallantly offered her his arm.

"Where are you taking his highness, madame?" asked Monsoreau, uneasily.

"Into the greenhouse, monsieur."

"Ah!" cried Monsoreau. "Well, take me into the greenhouse, too."

"Egad!" said Rémy. "I think I did right not to kill him. God be thanked! He's sure to kill himself without help."

Diane smiled on Bussy in a way that promised wonders.

"Don't let M. de Monsoreau suspect," said she, in a whisper, "that you are going away from Anjou; leave the rest to me."

"As you wish," answered Bussy.

And he went up to the prince, just as the litter of Monsoreau was turning round a clump of trees.

"Monseigneur," said he, "be careful; be particularly on your guard not to let Monsoreau know we are on the point of coming to terms."

"Why?"

"Because he would, very likely, inform the queen mother of

our real intentions, with the view of making her his friend; and you may be pretty sure, if Madame Catharine is aware of our plans she won't be at all as generous in our regard as she is at present."

"You are right," said the duke. "So you distrust him?"

"Distrust Monsoreau? Well! what a question!"

"Well, so do I. In fact, I believe that he gave out the report of his death to humbug us."

"Oh, no, I assure you! Saint-Jac made a hole in him, beyond a doubt. That idiot Rémy, who brought him to life, was quite certain at first that he was dead. In fact, he must have as many lives as a cat."

They were in front of the greenhouse.

Diane smiled on the duke more charmingly than ever.

The prince was the first to enter, then Diane. Monsoreau wished to follow; but, when his litter came to the threshold, it was evident it could not go in. The door was constructed in the ogival fashion, was long and high, but not wider than a good-sized trunk. Now, M. de Monsoreau's litter was six feet in width.

When the count perceived that the door was too narrow to admit his litter, he groaned.

Diane entered the greenhouse, utterly unmoved by the violent gestures of her husband.

Bussy, who was accustomed to read the young woman's heart through her eyes, understood perfectly the meaning of her smiles. He remained beside Monsoreau, and said, with perfect coolness:

"It's no use trying, M. le Comte; the door is too narrow, and you can never pass through it."

"Monseigneur! monseigneur!" cried Monsoreau, "do not enter that greenhouse; the exhalations from some of the plants are deadly, the perfumes of certain foreign flowers are poisonous. Monseigneur! monseigneur!"

But François was not listening; he forgot his customary prudence in his delight at feeling Diane's hand in his, and was soon lost in the flowery windings of the conservatory.

Bussy did his best to calm the impatience of Monsoreau; but, notwithstanding his well-meant efforts, what might have been expected to happen happened: Monsoreau had an iron constitution, and could bear physical pain easily; but his mental agony got the better of him.

He fainted.

Rémy resumed all his authority over him ; he ordered the wounded man to be carried to his bedroom.

"What am I to do now ? " he asked Bussy.

"Oh, finish the task you began so well," answered the count ; " stay with him and cure him."

Then he informed Diane of the accident that had happened to her husband.

Diane immediately left the duke and proceeded to the castle.

"Have we succeeded ? " inquired Bussy, when she came near him.

"I think so," she answered ; "in any case, do not go before you have seen Gertrude."

The duke's fondness for flowers only lasted as long as Diane was there to show them to him ; when she went away, he recollected Monsoreau's warnings and hurried out of the building.

Ribeirac, Antraguët, and Livarot followed him.

Meanwhile Diane had joined her husband. Rémy was holding a vial of smelling-salts to his nose, and the count soon opened his eyes.

His first impulse was to rise up violently ; Rémy, however, had foreseen the movement and held him firmly on the bed.

He uttered a groan of despair, but, looking round, he perceived Diane standing by his pillow.

"Ah ! it is you, madame," said he ; "I am very glad to see you, as I wanted to tell you that we start for Paris to-night."

Rémy protested loudly, but Monsoreau paid as little attention to Rémy as if he had not been there at all.

"Surely you are not thinking of such a journey, monsieur ? " answered Diane, with her usual calmness, "and your wound !"

"Madame," said the count, "the wound does not matter ; I would rather die on the roadside than suffer what I am suffering ; so we leave here to-night."

"Very well, monsieur ; just as you please," replied Diane.

"This pleases me, then ; have the goodness to make your preparations for the journey."

"My preparations are soon made, monsieur ; but may I ask what is the cause of this sudden resolution ?"

"I will tell you, madame, when you have no more flowers to show the prince and when I have doors wide enough to allow litters to pass through them."

Diane bowed.

“ But, madame ” — said Rémy.

“ M. le Comte wishes it,” she answered, “ and my duty is to obey.”

And Rémy thought he noticed that the young woman made a sign to him to raise no further objections.

He kept silent, then, though not without grumbling.

“ They ’ll kill him as sure as fate,” said he, “ and then say it was the medicine that did the job ! ”

During this time the Duc d’Anjou was getting ready to leave Méridor.

He expressed, in the strongest terms, his gratitude to the baron for the reception that had been given him.

Just as he was mounting his horse, Gertrude made her appearance. She was sent, she said, to assure the duke that her mistress regretted very much she could not have the honor of bidding his highness adieu, but she was unable to leave her husband.

Then Gertrude whispered to Bussy that Diane was about to set out for Paris.

The prince and his attendants started for Angers.

François had all the whims and caprices natural to such a degenerate being.

If Diane had frowned upon him, he would not have cared particularly to remain in Anjou ; but the smiles of Diane were a bait calculated to keep him in the province.

As he was in ignorance of the grand huntsman’s resolution, he began to think, on his way back to the city, that perhaps he had been too hasty in complying with the wishes of the queen mother.

Bussy had foreseen this, and he had strong hopes that the duke would not quit Anjou.

“ Listen, Bussy,” said the prince, “ I have been reflecting.”

“ On what, might I ask ? ” inquired the young man.

“ That it is not wise to give in at once to my mother.”

“ You are right ; she is vain enough already of her diplomatic successes without that.”

“ And then, you see, if we keep the matter open for a week, and have receptions and gather the nobles of the province round us, we ’ll show our mother how strong we are.”

“ Admirably reasoned, monseigneur. Still, it seems to me that ” —

"Oh, I will remain here a week; by doing so, I'm sure to wring fresh concessions from my mother, you may take my word for it."

Bussy appeared to be in deep thought.

"Of course, monseigneur, I should like to see you wring all the concessions you can from her. But yet you had better see to it that your position be not injured, instead of bettered, by this delay. The King might" —

"Well, what about the King?"

"The King, not being aware of your intentions, might get angry; it is not hard to anger the King."

"You are right; I must send some one to do homage to the King in my name and inform him of my approaching return; that will give me the week I need."

"Yes, but that 'some one' you speak of will run a great risk."

"In case I changed my resolution, eh?" said the prince, with his evil smile.

"Which, in spite of your promise to your brother, you will change, if your interests demand it. Is not that true?"

"Hum!" muttered the prince.

"And then your ambassador is pretty sure to be sent to the Bastille!"

"We'll give him a letter and not inform him of its contents."

"On the contrary, don't give him a letter, but tell him what he is to say."

"Why, if I did so, I could get nobody to undertake the mission!"

"Oh, nonsense!"

"You are acquainted with a man that would do so?"

"Yes, I am acquainted with him."

"Who is he?"

"Myself, monseigneur!"

"You?"

"Yes, I am rather fond of difficult negotiations."

"Bussy, my dear Bussy," cried the duke, "if you do that, I shall be eternally grateful to you."

Bussy smiled. He had had some experience of the prince's eternal gratitude.

The duke thought he was hesitating.

"I will give you ten thousand crowns for the expenses of your journey," he added.

"Not necessary, monseigneur," said Bussy, "such things are not paid for. You are too noble-minded to think they can be, are you not?"

"Then you will start?"

"Yes."

"For Paris?"

"For Paris."

"And when?"

"Faith, whenever you wish."

"The sooner the better."

"Yes, I think so."

"Well, then?"

"To-night, if you wish."

"My brave Bussy! my dear Bussy! Then you really consent?"

"Of course I do. Why, monseigneur, you must be well aware by this time that I would go through fire and water to serve your highness. The thing is settled, then! But you will stay here and enjoy yourself; so you must get the queen mother to bestow some fat abbey or other on me."

"I have been thinking of doing so already."

"Then adieu, monseigneur."

"Adieu, Bussy — But do not forget one thing."

"What is it?"

"To take leave of my mother."

"I shall do myself that honor."

And Bussy, brisker and happier than a schoolboy when the bell has rung for recreation, paid his farewell visit to Catharine and then prepared to depart as soon as the signal should come from Méridor.

But the signal did not come until the next morning. The count was so enfeebled after the scenes through which he had passed that even he himself felt the need of a night's repose.

About seven, however, the same groom that had brought Saint-Luc's letter to Bussy came to him with the tidings that, in spite of the old baron's tears, and in spite of Rémy's remonstrances, the count had set out in a litter for Paris, escorted by Diane, Gertrude, and Rémy on horseback.

This litter was carried by eight men, who were relieved by others every three miles.

Bussy delayed no longer than to listen to the news; he jumped on a horse that had been saddled the previous evening and galloped along the road taken by Monsoreau.

CHAPTER LXXII.

HOW THE KING RECEIVED SAINT-LUC WHEN HE APPEARED
AT COURT.

WHATEVER confidence the King may have had in the ambassador he had sent to Anjou, he was as zealous as ever in taking measures to meet the attacks of his brother.

He knew by experience what was the ruling passion in his family, and he knew, too, what he had to expect from a pretender to the crown, the very novelty of whose claims would give him an advantage over its legitimate but weary and effete possessor.

He found a sort of dismal amusement, somewhat after the fashion of Tiberius, in drawing up, with the aid of Chicot, long lists of proscriptions, in which were inscribed in alphabetical order all those whom he supposed unfriendly to the royal cause.

These lists grew longer every day.

And whenever the King came to an S and an L, his majesty was sure to write down the name of Saint-Luc, which thus appeared several times on his muster roll.

Moreover, the King's resentment was stimulated by the perfidious allusions and insinuations of the courtiers, and especially by their denunciations of Saint-Luc's flight to Anjou, a flight which became treasonable on the day when the duke, himself a fugitive, had started for that province.

In fact, should not Saint-Luc, after he had arrived at Méridor, be considered as simply the Duc d'Anjou's quartermaster, sent in advance of the prince to prepare lodgings for him at Angers?

In the midst of all this agitation and commotion, the way in which Chicot encouraged the minions to sharpen their rapiers and daggers, so as to have them in the best condition for stabbing and cutting down his most Christian Majesty's enemies, was a magnificent spectacle.

And the magnificence of the spectacle was not lessened by the fact that while the Gascon evidently wished it to be thought that he was simply the fly on the coach, he was really playing a far more serious part.

Little by little, and, so to speak, man by man, he was engaged all the time in enrolling an army for the King.

One afternoon when the King was supping with the Queen, whose society he sought frequently in times of political peril, Chicot entered suddenly, walking with arms and legs distended to the utmost, like a puppet on wires.

"Ugh!" said he.

"What?" asked the King.

"M. de Saint-Luc," answered Chicot.

"M. de Saint-Luc?" exclaimed Henri.

"Yes."

"In Paris?"

"Yes."

"In the Louvre?"

"Yes."

At this triple affirmation the King rose from the table, red and trembling. It would have been difficult to say by what emotions he was excited.

"Excuse me," he said to the Queen, as he wiped his mustache and flung his napkin on the chair, "but this is one of those state affairs which do not concern women."

"Yes," said Chicot, speaking in his loudest tone, "this is a state affair."

The Queen half rose from her seat, intending to leave the apartment.

"No, madame," said Henri, "oblige me by remaining. I am going into my cabinet."

"Oh! sire," said the Queen, in a voice denoting the tender interest she always took in her ungrateful husband, "I beseech you do not lose your temper."

"God forbid!" answered Henri, without noticing the air of mockery with which Chicot twisted his mustache.

Henri passed hastily out of the chamber, followed by Chicot. Once outside:

"What has he come to do here, the traitor?" asked Henri, in an agitated voice.

"Who knows?" answered Chicot.

"He comes as deputy from the States of Anjou. I am quite sure of that. He comes as ambassador from my brother, and naturally, too, considering what happens in all rebellions: they are troubled and muddy waters in which the disloyal always manage to fish with profit to themselves. It is true their profits are mean and sordid, but they ultimately turn to their advantage; for, however provisional and precarious they

are at first, they gradually become fixed and immutable. As soon as Saint-Luc got an inkling of the rebellion, he considered it gave him a chance of obtaining a safe-conduct and, therefore, an opportunity to come here and insult me."

"Who knows?" said Chicot.

The King stared for a moment at his curt companion.

"Perhaps, on the other hand," continued Henri, walking up and down the gallery with an irregular step that betrayed his agitation, "it may be that he comes to demand the restoration of his estates, the rents of which I am keeping in my own hands, — possibly a little arbitrary on my part, as, after all, he has committed no crime. Eh?"

"Who knows?" replied Chicot.

"Ah!" exclaimed Henri, "you are like my popinjay, always repeating the same thing. *Mort de ma vie!* You will drive me crazy in the end with your eternal 'Who knows?'"

"And, *mordieu!* do you think you are very amusing yourself with your eternal questions?"

"At least you might answer some of them."

"And what answer do you want? Do you take me, peradventure, for the Fatum of the ancients? Do you take me for Jupiter or Apollo or Manto? It is you, egad! that will drive me crazy with your idiotic suppositions."

"Monsieur Chicot" —

"Well, what next, Monsieur Henri?"

"Chicot, my friend, you see how afflicted I am and yet you jeer at me."

"Well, don't be afflicted, then, *mordieu!*"

"But everybody betrays me."

"Who knows, *ventre de biche!* who knows?"

Henri, lost in conjectures as to the motive for Saint-Luc's return, went down into his cabinet. There he found, already assembled, all the gentlemen who held official positions in the Louvre, and among them, or rather at their head, the dashing Crillon, with his fiery eyes, red nose, and bristling mustache. He looked not unlike a bulldog who was furious for a scuffle.

Saint-Luc was there also, standing coolly in the centre of these menacing faces; angry murmurs reached his ears, but he did not show the least sign of agitation.

Strange to say, his wife had come with him, and was seated on a stool close to the bed.

The husband, his hand firmly planted on the hip, returned

the insolent looks of those around him with looks fully as insolent as their own.

Through respect for the young woman, certain of the courtiers, who had a strong desire to jostle Saint-Luc, retired to a distance from him, and although it would have pleased them to address a few disagreeable words to him, they were silent. So it was in the void and silence made around him that the ex-favorite moved.

Jeanne, modestly muffled in her travelling mantle, was waiting, with eyes cast down.

Saint-Luc, haughtily draped in his cloak, was waiting, in an attitude that seemed to challenge hostility rather than to fear it.

On the other hand, the gentlemen present were waiting, perfectly ready to call Saint-Luc to account, and also anxious to find out what was his business in this court, where all who desired to share in the favor once enjoyed by him thought his appearance in it now decidedly uncalled for.

In fact, when the King appeared, it was the expectation of all the waiters that their waiting was to be followed by something important.

Henri entered, evidently very excited, and doing his best to add further intensity to his excitement; a manner that has been thought to give dignity to the deportment of princes.

He was followed by Chicot, who assumed that air of calmness and dignity a king of France ought to have assumed, and was evidently struck by the bearing of Saint-Luc in the way in which Henri III. ought at once to have been struck by it.

"Ha! so you are here?" cried the King, immediately on entering, taking no notice of those around him, in this resembling the bull in the Spanish arena, who sees in the thousands of men before him only a moving fog, and in the rainbow of banners a single color — red.

"Yes, sire," answered Saint-Luc, modestly and simply, as he made a respectful inclination.

So little effect had this response on the King's ear, so little successful was this calm and deferential behavior in communicating to his darkened mind those feelings of reason and mildness which the union of respect for others with the sense of personal dignity ought to excite, that the King went on, without pausing:

"Really, your presence in the Louvre is a strange surprise to me."

At this rude attack there was a deathlike silence around the King and his late favorite.

It was the silence that used to arise in the lists when it was known that the two adversaries must fight out their conflict to the bitter end.

Saint-Luc was the first to break it.

"Sire," said he, with his usual grace, and without seeming at all disturbed by this royal sally, "what surprises me is that, considering the circumstances in which you are placed, your Majesty did not expect me."

"What does that mean, monsieur?" answered Henri, with a pride that was altogether royal, and raising his face, which on great occasions assumed an expression of incomparable dignity.

"Sire," said Saint-Luc, "your Majesty is in great danger."

"In great danger!" cried the courtiers.

"Yes, gentlemen, this danger is very great and very real and very serious, a danger in which the King has need of the smallest as well as of the greatest of those devoted to him; and, with the firm conviction that, in such a danger as that to which I allude, no help is too feeble to be disregarded, I have come to lay at the feet of my King the offer of my humble services."

"Aha!" said Chicot, "you see, my son, I was right in saying: 'Who knows?'"

Henri did not reply at once. He looked round at his courtiers; they were evidently annoyed and offended; he soon gauged from their looks the jealousy that rankled in the hearts of most of them.

He concluded, therefore, that Saint-Luc had done something which the majority of the assembly were incapable of doing, that is to say, something disinterested.

However, he did not like to surrender all at once.

"Monsieur," he answered, "you have only done your duty; your services are due to us."

"The services of all the King's subjects are due to the King; I am aware of that, sire," replied Saint-Luc; "but in these times many people forget to pay their debts. I, sire, have come to pay mine, happy if your Majesty be graciously pleased to always number me among your debtors."

Henri, disarmed by Saint-Luc's unalterable gentleness and humility, advanced a step toward him.

"So, then," said he, "you return from no other motive

except the one you mention? You have no mission or safe-conduct?"

"Sire," answered Saint-Luc, eagerly, for he knew from his master's tone that he was no longer angry or vindictive, "I have returned purely and simply for the sake of returning, and that, too, as fast as my horse could carry me. And now, your Majesty may throw me into the Bastille in an hour, and may have me shot in two; but I shall have done my duty. Sire, Anjou is on fire; Touraine is on the point of revolting, and Guyenne is rising and will lend her a hand. M. le Duc d'Anjou is hard at work in the west and south of France."

"And he is well supported, is he not?" cried the King.

"Sire," said Saint-Luc, "neither advice nor argument can stay the duke; and even M. de Bussy, unmoved as he is himself, cannot inspire your brother with courage, so terrible is his dread of your Majesty."

"Ha! he trembles, then, the rebel!" said Henri, and he smiled under his mustache.

"Egad!" said Chicot to himself, rubbing his chin, "that Saint-Luc is wondrous clever!"

And elbowing the King out of the way:

"Stand aside, Henri," said he, "I want to shake hands with M. de Saint-Luc."

Chicot's movement won over the King entirely. He allowed the Gascon to pay his compliments to the newcomer; then, going slowly up to his former friend, he laid his hand on his shoulder and said:

"You are welcome, Saint-Luc."

"Ah, sire," cried Saint-Luc, kissing the King's hand, "I have found my beloved master again at last!"

"Yes, but I do not find you again, my poor Saint-Luc," returned the King; "you have grown so thin that, if I had met you in the street, I should not have recognized you."

At these words a feminine voice was heard.

"Sire," said this voice, "his grief at displeasing your Majesty is the cause of his thinness."

Although the voice was very soft and respectful, Henri started. It sounded as disagreeably in his ears as did the noise of thunder in the ears of Augustus.

"Madame de Saint-Luc!" he murmured. "Ah! — yes — I had forgotten."

Jeanne flung herself on her knees.

"Rise, madame," said the King. "I love all who bear the name of Saint-Luc."

Jeanne seized the King's hand and raised it to her lips.

Henri withdrew it quickly.

"Go," said Chicot to the young woman. "Go and try to convert the King, *ventre de biche!* You are pretty enough to succeed!"

But Henri turned his back on Jeanne, and, throwing his arm around Saint-Luc's neck, proceeded with him to his apartments.

"So we have made peace, Saint-Luc?" said the King.

"Say rather, sire," answered the courtier, "that a pardon has been granted."

"Madame," whispered Chicot to Jeanne, who was uncertain what to do, "a good wife should not forsake her husband, especially when that husband is in danger."

And he pushed Jeanne after the King and Saint-Luc.

CHAPTER LXXIII.

IN WHICH ARE MET TWO IMPORTANT PERSONAGES WHOM THE READER HAS LOST SIGHT OF FOR SOME TIME.

THERE is one of the personages belonging to this history — nay, even two — about whose feats and achievements the reader has the right to demand information.

With all the humility of the author of a preface in past ages, we hasten to answer the reader's questions, for we are not blind to their importance.

The first question would naturally concern an enormous monk, with bushy eyebrows, lips red and fleshy, big hands, vast shoulders, and a neck that grows smaller every day, while the chest and cheeks gain in development what it loses.

The next question would concern a very large donkey, whose sides had grown so rotund that they now presented the graceful outlines of a balloon.

The monk will soon resemble a hogshead supported by two posts.

The ass already resembles a child's cradle resting on four distaffs.

The one is the tenant of a cell in the convent of Sainte Geneviève, where all the graces of the Lord come to visit him.

The other is a tenant in one of the stables of the same convent, where he lives within reach of a manger that is always full.

The one answers to the name of Gorenflot.

The other should answer to the name of Panurge.

Both, for the time at least, are in the enjoyment of the most prosperous lot ever dreamed of by ass or monk. The Genevievans are lavish of their attentions to their illustrious comrade, and like unto the divinities of the third order, whose care it used to be to wait upon Jupiter's eagle and Juno's peacock and Venus's doves, so the lay brothers make it their special concern to fatten Panurge in honor of his master.

The abbey kitchen smokes perpetually. The most renowned vineyards in Burgundy supply the vintage that is poured into the largest-sized glasses ever known.

Does a missionary arrive at the convent after propagating the faith in foreign lands, or a confidential legate from the Pope with indulgences granted by his holiness? Brother Gorenflot is at once placed on exhibition as a model of the church preaching as well as of the church militant, as one who handles the Word like Saint Luke and the sword like Saint Paul. Gorenflot is pointed out to them in all his glory, that is to say, in the midst of a feast, seated at a table wherein a hollow has been cut out for his sacred stomach, and the holy pilgrim is told with noble pride that their Gorenflot, without any assistance at all, engorges the rations of eight of the most robust appetites in the convent.

And when the visitor has piously contemplated this marvelous spectacle :

"What an admirably endowed nature is his!" says the prior, with clasped hands and eyes raised to heaven. "Brother Gorenflot loves good cheer, and he also cultivates the arts; you see how he eats! Ah! if you could have heard the sermon he preached on a certain night, a sermon in which he offered to sacrifice his life for the triumph of the faith! Behold a mouth that speaks like that of Saint John Chrysostom, and swallows like that of Gargantua!"

Sometimes, however, it happens that in the midst of all these splendors a cloud settles on the brow of Gorenflot; the

fat pullets of Mans in vain exhale their delicious odors under his wide nostrils; in vain do the little oysters of Flanders — a thousand of which he has ingulped in mere sport — gape and wriggle in their pearly couches; the multiform bottles, though uncorked, remain intact; Gorenflot is gloomy; Gorenflot is not hungry; Gorenflot is pensive.

Then the report runs that the worthy Genevievean is in an ecstasy like Saint Francis, or in a swoon like Saint Teresa, and the admiration of his brethren for him is redoubled.

He is more than a monk, he is a saint; he is more than a saint, he is a demigod; some even say he is an entire god.

“Hush!” murmur his brethren; “disturb not the trance of Brother Gorenflot!”

And they respectfully retire.

The prior alone waits for the moment when Brother Gorenflot gives some faint sign of life; he then approaches the monk, takes his hand obsequiously, and addresses him deferentially. Gorenflot raises his head and looks at the prior with lack-lustre eyes.

He is coming back from another world.

“What were you doing, my worthy brother?” asks the prior.

“I?” answers Gorenflot.

“Yes, you; you were doing something.”

“Yes, father prior, I was composing a sermon.”

“Like the one you had the courage to deliver on the night of the Holy League?”

Every time this sermon is mentioned Gorenflot deplores his infirmity.

“Yes,” said he, with a sigh, “like that one. But, ah! what a pity it is I did not write it down!”

“Does a man like you need to write, my dear brother?” would be the prior’s answer. “No, he speaks by inspiration; he opens his mouth, and, as he is full of the Word of God, the Word of God flows from his lips.”

“Do you think so?” murmurs Gorenflot.

“Happy the man whose humility makes him doubt of his gifts,” replies the prior.

And, in fact, Gorenflot, who comprehends the necessities of the situation and what his antecedents naturally lead others to expect from him, occasionally thinks of composing a sermon.

Yes, Gorenflot is going to play the very mischief with Marcus Tullius and Cæsar and Saint Gregory and Saint

Augustine and Saint Jerome and Tertullian, for sacred eloquence is about to be renewed by the illustrious Genevievean. *Rerum novus ordo nascitur.*

From time to time also, at the end of a repast, or even in the middle of his ecstasies, Gorenflot would rise, and, as if pushed on by some invisible arm, would go straight to the stable; after entering, he looked fondly at Panurge, who brayed with pleasure; then he passed his heavy hand over the animal's sides, his big fingers disappearing in the superabundant hair. This was more than pleasure for Panurge; it was bliss, and, not content with braying, he rolled over in his delight.

The prior and three or four dignitaries of the convent usually attended him in these excursions, and must have rather bored Panurge with their platitudes. But, on the other hand, they offered him cakes, biscuits, and macaroons, as those who desired to win Pluto's favor in days of yore were in the habit of offering honey cakes to his dog Cerberus.

Panurge makes no objection; he is of a rather good-natured disposition; besides, having no ecstasies, having no sermon to compose, and having no reputation to support except his reputation for obstinacy, idleness, and luxury, he finds that none of his desires is left ungratified and that he is the happiest ass in the world.

The prior looks at him with emotion.

"Simplicity and gentleness," says he, "are the virtues of the strong."

Gorenflot has discovered that *ita* in Latin corresponds to *yes*: this discovery has been of marvellous service to him, and to every question he generally answers: *ita*, with a self-complacency that never fails to be effective.

The abbot, encouraged by finding him so constantly acquiescent, will sometimes say:

"You work too hard, my dear brother, and this accounts for your occasional dejection."

And Gorenflot's response to Messire Joseph Foulon is like that made sometimes to Henri III. by Chicot:

"Who knows?"

"Perhaps," adds the prior, "our repasts are too coarse for your taste; would you like me to change the brother cook? As you well know, dear brother, *Quaedam saturationes minus succedunt.*"

"*Ita*," is the eternal answer of Gorenflot, made without ever interrupting the caresses he lavishes on his ass.

"You show extraordinary fondness for your Panurge, my brother," says the prior, sometimes; "perhaps a desire to travel has again taken possession of your soul."

To which Gorenflot's answer would be an "oh!" and a sigh.

The fact is that it is the memory of his travels that tortures Gorenflot; for Gorenflot, who had at first looked on his removal from the convent as a terrible misfortune, had discovered during his exile certain infinite and unknown delights that have their source in liberty.

Amid all his happiness, this longing for freedom was like a worm gnawing at the heart; freedom with Chicot, the jolly comrade; with Chicot, whom he loved without well knowing why; perhaps it was because he was now and then beaten by him.

"Alas!" timidly observed a young brother, after a careful study of the monk's physiognomy, "I am afraid you are right, honored prior, and that the reverend father finds his stay in our convent wearisome."

"No, that is hardly correct," answered Gorenflot; "but I feel I was born for a life of struggle, destined to hold forth in the interests of the church at the cross roads and in the suburbs."

While saying these words, the eyes of Gorenflot brighten; he is thinking of the omelets he had eaten with Chicot, of Maître Claude Bonhomet's Anjou wine, and of the low-roofed hall in the *Corne d'Abondance*.

Ever since the evening of the League, or rather, ever since the morning he returned to his convent, he has not been allowed to go out; for, after the King appointed himself chief of the Union, the Leaguers became exceedingly prudent.

And then, Gorenflot is so simple-minded that he never even thought of taking advantage of his lofty position and ordering the gates to be thrown open.

He was told that no one was allowed to go out, and so he did not go out.

And none of his brethren had the slightest suspicion of the real reason why his abode in the convent was so irksome to him.

At last the prior, seeing he was becoming sadder and sadder every day, said to him one morning:

"My dear brother, no one ought to resist his vocation, yours is to combat for Christ; go, then, fulfil the mission confided to you by the Lord; but guard your precious life carefully, and return for the great day."

"What great day?" asked Gorenflot, forgetting in his joy what he was expected to know.

"That of Corpus Christi."

"*Ha,*" said the monk, with an air of deep sagacity; "but," added Gorenflot, "give me some money, so that by bestowing it in alms, I may be inspired to fulfil my task in a truly Christian spirit."

The prior went hastily for a large wallet, which he opened and held before Gorenflot, who plunged his huge hand deep in it.

"You will see what I shall bring back with me to the convent," said he, as he stuffed the money he had just borrowed from the prior's wallet into the big pocket in his robe.

"You have your text, have you not, my dear brother?" inquired Joseph Foulon.

"Yes, certainly."

"Confide it to me."

"With pleasure; but to you alone."

The prior drew near to Gorenflot and lent an attentive ear.

"Listen."

"I am listening."

"'The flail that thrashes the corn thrashes itself.'"

"Magnificent! Sublime!" cried the prior.

And the other monks present sincerely shared the enthusiasm of Messire Joseph Foulon, and repeated after him:

"Magnificent! Sublime!"

"And am I now free, father?" asked Gorenflot, humbly.

"Yes, my son," answered the reverend abbot, "go and walk in the path of the Lord."

Gorenflot, thereupon, had Panurge saddled, succeeded in bestriding him, with the aid of two vigorous monks, and sallied forth from the convent about seven in the evening.

It was on the same day that Saint-Luc arrived from Méridor, bringing news that created the utmost excitement in Paris.

Gorenflot, after following the Rue Saint-Étienne, turned to the right and passed the Jacobin convent, when suddenly Panurge started; he had just felt the pressure of a heavy hand on his crupper.

"Who goes there?" cried Gorenflot, in terror.

"A friend," answered a voice he thought he recognized.

Gorenflot longed to turn round, but, like those sailors who, every time they go aboard find it takes time to enable them to adjust their gait to the rolling of the vessel, whenever the monk mounted his ass anew he found it also took some time to master his centre of gravity.

"What do you want?" said he.

"Would you have the goodness, worthy brother," replied the voice, "to show me the way to the *Corne d'Abondance*?"

"*Morbleu!*" exclaimed Gorenflot, joyfully, "it is M. Chicot in person."

"Perfectly correct," answered the Gascon. "I was going to the convent for you, my dear brother, when I saw you outside of it. I have followed you for some time, afraid that, if I spoke to you, it might compromise your character. But, now that we are quite alone, how goes it, you rogue? *Ventre de biche!* you have grown thin!"

"And you, M. Chicot, have grown fat, you may take my word for it."

"I think both of us are a little inclined to flatter each other."

"But what is the matter with you, M. Chicot?" said the monk; "you appear to be carrying something heavy."

"A quarter of venison I stole from his Majesty," said the Gascon. "We'll broil a few steaks off it."

"Dear M. Chicot!" cried the monk; "and under the other arm?"

"A bottle of Cyprus wine sent by a king to my King."

"Let us have a look at it," said Gorenflot.

"It is my favorite wine; I am very fond of it," said Chicot, drawing aside his cloak; "are not you also, my good brother?"

"Oh! oh!" was all the monk could say when he perceived this double godsend, and he gave such a jump in his saddle that Panurge bent under him, "oh! oh!"

In his joy the monk raised his arms to heaven, and in a voice that shook the windows in the houses on each side of him, he sang the following song, in which he was accompanied by Panurge:

"Music has charms beyond compare,
But charms that through our ears regale us.
Flowers have odors rich and rare.
But, when we're hungry, perfumes fail us,

A blue, clear sky is pleasant to see,
When no black cloud comes marring our pleasure.
Still, wine that down the throat runs free
Has joys superior beyond measure.
It smells as sweet as any flower;
You touch and taste and drink it gladly,
'T is brighter than skies that sometimes lower.
No wonder that I love it madly!"

It was the first time that Gorenflot had sung for nearly a whole month.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

HOW BUSSY PURSUED A PARTY OF FRIENDS AND ENEMIES
BY RIDING IN FRONT OF THEM.

LET us allow the two friends to enter the hostelry of the *Corne d'Abondance*, where, it will be remembered, Chicot never brought Gorenflot without some design or other the importance of which the monk was far from suspecting, and let us return to M. de Monsoreau, as he follows the highway from Méridor to Paris in his litter, and to Bussy also, who started from Angers with the intention of pursuing the same route.

It is not difficult for a well-mounted horseman to overtake travellers on foot, but still he runs a certain risk, — he may pass them on the way.

Now this is just what happened to Bussy.

It was the end of May, and the heat was excessive, especially about noon.

For this reason, M. de Monsoreau ordered his bearers to enter a little wood near the road and stop there for a time. He was also desirous that his departure should be known to the Duc d'Anjou at as late a period as possible. Therefore, both to escape observation from some unfriendly passer-by, and to avoid the sultriness that prevailed at the time, he directed his attendants to proceed to the most sheltered part of the grove; and, as they had a horse laden with provisions, a collation could be prepared without much trouble.

During this time Bussy passed them.

But Bussy had not travelled far, as may easily be imagined, without inquiring whether a party of horsemen and a litter carried by peasants had been seen.

On the way to the village of Durtal he had received information of the most positive and satisfactory nature. Convinced, therefore, that Diane was only a little in advance of him, he had ridden on slowly, standing in his stirrups, whenever he came to an elevation, to get a glimpse of those he was in the wake of.

But suddenly, and contrary to his expectation, all traces of them disappeared; the travellers he chanced to come across told him they had seen nobody, and, as soon as he reached the first houses in La Flèche, he became convinced that, instead of being behind, he was in advance, — that he was ahead of them instead of being in the rear of them.

Then he remembered the little wood and discovered the reason why his horse had neighed several times when going by it.

He came to a resolution, and acted on it at once; he took up his quarters in the worst inn in the street. After seeing that his horse was taken care of, for he was more anxious about the beast's comfort than about his own, especially as he might have to rely on his strength before long, he took his station behind the linen rag that did duty for a curtain on the window of his room.

Bussy's choice of this low tavern as a temporary resting-place was determined by the fact that it was opposite the principal hotel in the town, at which he was pretty certain of Monsoreau stopping.

Bussy's anticipation turned out correct. About four in the afternoon a courier arrived and halted in front of the hostelry.

Half an hour later came the whole party. It consisted of the count and countess, Gertrude and Rémy, and of eight bearers who had taken the place of eight other bearers about nine miles from the village.

The courier's business was to recruit peasants for these relays.

Now, as Monsoreau was too jealous not to be liberal, he found no difficulty in travelling in this rather singular fashion.

The principal persons of the company entered the hotel, one after the other. Diane was the last to go in, and Bussy fancied that she looked anxiously around. His first impulse was to show himself, but he had the courage to check it; any imprudent act on his part might ruin them.

Night came on. Bussy hoped that, after it was dark, Rémy

might come out or Gertrude appear at a window. He wrapped his cloak about him and mounted guard in the street.

He waited till nine; at nine the courier left the hotel.

Five minutes later eight men approached the door and four of them entered.

"I wonder," thought Bussy, "will they travel by night. If M. de Monsoreau take such an idea into his head, it will please me well."

Everything, in fact, showed the probability of the party doing so. It was a mild night and the sky was lit up by innumerable stars. One of those soft breezes that seem the very breathings of a rejuvenated earth swept through the balmy air, caressing everything it touched.

The litter passed out first.

Then came Diane, Rémy, and Gertrude on horseback.

Diane gazed eagerly around her; but the count summoned her and she had to ride beside the litter.

Four of the peasants lit torches and marched in twos on each side of this litter.

"Good," said Bussy. "If I had the arrangement of the journey myself I could not have managed things better."

And he returned to the tavern, saddled his horse, and followed the party.

This time he could neither mistake the road nor lose sight of them: the torches showed the way clearly.

Monsoreau scarcely allowed Diane to move from his side.

He talked with her, or rather scolded her.

The visit to the greenhouse served as a text for endless commentaries and for a crowd of venomous questions.

Rémy and Gertrude were both out of temper, or, to speak more correctly, Rémy was in a brown study and Gertrude was out of temper with Rémy.

The cause of her ill-humor could be easily explained: now that Diane was in love with Bussy, Rémy no longer saw any reason why he should be in love with Gertrude.

The party, then, moved along, some quarrelling, others sulking, when Bussy, who had for a time lost sight of the cavalcade, warned Rémy of his presence by a whistle. For this purpose he used a silver whistle which served his turn when he had to summon his servants in the hotel in the Rue de Grenelle Saint-Honoré.

It had a shrill, vibrating sound, which could be heard in any part of the mansion and its appurtenances.

Men and beasts ran up when they heard it.

We say men and beasts, for Bussy, like all strong natures, took great pleasure in training bellicose dogs, refractory horses, and wild falcons.

Now, whenever he blew this whistle, the dogs would start in their kennels, the horses in their stables, and the falcons on their perches.

Rémy recognized it at once. Diane was troubled, and looked at the young man, who made an affirmative sign.

Then he rode round to the left and said, in an undertone :

"It is he."

"What is the matter?" asked Monsoreau, "and who is speaking to you, madame?"

"To me, monsieur? Nobody."

"Oh, yes, there is. I saw a shadow near you, and I heard a voice."

"The voice was M. Rémy's; are you jealous also of M. Rémy?"

"No, but I like those around me to speak aloud; it diverts my attention."

"There are some things, however, which it would be as well M. le Comte should not hear," said Gertrude, coming to the rescue of her mistress.

"Why so?"

"For two reasons."

"What are they?"

"The first reason is that what is said might not interest M. le Comte; the second is that it might interest him too much."

"And to which class belong the things said to madame by M. Rémy?"

"To the class of things that might interest M. le Comte too much."

"What was Rémy saying to you, madame? I insist on knowing."

"I was saying, monsieur, that if you go on as you are doing, you'll be dead before we have gone a third of the journey."

The face of Monsoreau, seen in the sinister glare of the torches, became as pale as that of a corpse.

Diane was pensive and agitated, but silent.

"He is behind," said Rémy to Diane, in a voice scarcely intelligible. "Ride more slowly and he will come up with you."

Rémy had spoken so low that Monsoreau heard only a murmur. With a great effort he turned his head round and saw that Diane was following him.

"Another movement like that, M. le Comte," said Rémy, "and you are sure to have a return of your hæmorrhage."

Diane had now grown very courageous. From her love had sprung that audacity which, in every woman truly enamoured, ordinarily transcends reasonable limits. She turned back and waited.

At the same moment Rémy alighted, gave the reins to Gertrude to hold, and approached the litter with the view of distracting the count's attention.

"Let me feel your pulse," said he. "I would wager we are feverish."

Five minutes after, Bussy was by her side.

They had no need of speech to understand each other; for some moments they were locked in a tender embrace.

The first to break silence was Bussy. "You see," said he, "that where you go I follow."

"Oh! how beautiful will be my days, Bussy, how sweet my nights, if I know you are ever thus near me!"

"But by day he will see us."

"No, you will follow us from afar, and I alone will see you, my Louis. At the turn of some road, from the summit of some hill, the plume in your hat, the embroidery on your cloak, the fluttering of your handkerchief, will all speak in your name, will tell me I am loved. When the sun is declining, when azure mists are floating over the plain, let me but see your dear and ghostlike form gently bend as you waft to me the sweet kiss of eventide, and I shall be happy, oh! so happy!"

"Speak on, speak ever, beloved Diane, you are yourself unaware of all the music your sweet voice holds."

"And when we march by night, which we shall often do, for Rémy has told him the coolness of evening is good for his wounds; then as now, from time to time, I will stay behind, from time to time I shall be able to clasp you in my arms and to tell you, in a quick pressure of the hand, all that I shall have thought of you during the day."

"Oh! how I love you! how I love you!" murmured Bussy.

"Do you know," said Diane, "I believe our souls are so closely united that, though far apart, though never seeing each other, never speaking with each other, we can be happy in our thoughts."

"Yes! yes! but to see you, to hold you in my arms, — oh! Diane! Diane!"

And the horses came close together and disported themselves as they shook their silver bridles, and the two lovers forgot the world in a lingering embrace.

Suddenly was heard a voice that made both tremble, Diane with fear, Bussy with rage.

"Madame Diane," it cried, "where are you? Madame Diane, answer."

This cry pierced the air like some funeral shriek.

"Oh! 't is he! 't is he! I had forgotten him," murmured Diane. "It is he. I have been dreaming! Oh, sweet dream! Oh, horrible awaking!"

"Listen," cried Bussy, "listen, Diane, we are now together. Say but the word and nothing can ever separate us again. Diane, let us fly. What can prevent us from flying? Look: before us are space, happiness, liberty! A word, and we are gone, a word, and lost to him, you belong to me for eternity."

And the young man gently held her back.

"And my father?" said Diane.

"But when the baron knows how I love you," he murmured.

"Ah! he is a father," said Diane. "How does a father feel when his daughter acts as you would have me act?"

These words recalled Bussy to himself.

"I will not force you, my darling," said he; "order, and I obey."

"Listen," answered Diane, offering him her hand, "our destiny is yonder. Let us be stronger than the demon who persecutes us. Fear nothing and you shall see if I know how to love."

"Great heavens! and must we, then, part?" murmured Bussy.

"Countess! countess!" cried Monsoreau, "answer, or, though I kill myself, I will leap from this infernal litter."

"Adieu, Bussy, adieu," said Diane; "he would do as he says: he would kill himself."

"You pity him?"

"Jealous!" said Diane, in her charming voice and with her adorable smile.

And Bussy let her go.

In a moment she was at the litter: the count was almost unconscious.

"Stop!" he murmured, "stop!"

"*Morbleu!*" said Rémy, "do not stop! he is mad; if he want to kill himself, he can do so."

And the litter continued its course.

"But whom are you calling to?" cried Gertrude; "my lady is by my side. Pray, answer him, madame; I'm afraid M. le Comte is delirious."

Diane uttered not a word, but at once entered the space lit up by the torches.

"Ah!" said Monsoreau, feebly, "where were you?"

"Where should I be if not behind you, monsieur?"

"Beside me, madame, beside me; do not leave me."

Diane had no further reason for staying in the rear; she knew that Bussy was following her. If there had been moonlight, she could have seen him.

At last they came to the stopping-place.

After a few hours' rest, Monsoreau started again.

He was in a hurry, not to reach Paris, but to get away as far as possible from Angers.

The scenes we have just related were renewed at intervals.

Rémy said to himself:

"If rage should choke him, the physician's honor is saved."

But Monsoreau did not die. On the contrary, when he arrived in Paris, after a ten days' journey, there was a sensible improvement in his condition.

Rémy was a wonderfully skilful doctor, far more skilful than he would have wished in the present case.

During these ten days Diane had conquered all Bussy's pride by means of the tenderness she lavished on him.

She had persuaded him to visit Monsoreau and turn the latter's friendship for him to their mutual advantage.

The health of the count would afford a pretext for numerous visits.

Rémy took care of the husband and brought his master love-letters from the wife.

"Esculapius and Mercury," said he. "I am beginning to hold more offices than one."

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE ARRIVAL OF M. D'ANJOU'S AMBASSADOR AT THE LOUVRE
AND HIS RECEPTION THEREIN.

HOWEVER, neither Catharine nor the Duc d'Anjou reappeared at the Louvre, and the reports of dissensions between the brothers increased every day in extent and importance.

The King had received no message from his mother, and, instead of concluding according to the proverb: "No news is good news," he said, on the contrary, with a shake of the head: "No news is bad news."

The minions added:

"*François, badly advised*, has detained your mother."

"*François, badly advised*." In fact, the whole policy of this singular reign and of the three preceding reigns might be reduced to these two words: badly advised.

Charles IX. had been badly advised when he authorized the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, if he did not actually sign an edict in its favor. François I. had been badly advised when he ordered the massacre of Amboise.

Henri II., the father of a perverse race, had been badly advised when he burned so many heretics and conspirators, before being killed by Montgomery, and the latter, too, it was said, was badly advised when he allowed the shaft of his lance to penetrate the visor of the King's helmet.

No one ventured to say to a king:

"Your brother has bad blood in his veins; acting according to the traditions of your family, he is trying to dethrone, tonsure, or poison you. He wishes to do to you what you did to your eldest brother, what your eldest brother did to his, what your mother taught you to do to one another."

No, a king at that period, a king of the sixteenth century, would have taken such remarks as insults; for a king was then a man; it is civilization alone that has made him a facsimile of God, like Louis XIV., or an irresponsible myth, like a constitutional king.

The minions said to Henri III., then:

"Sire, your brother is badly advised."

Now, as Bussy alone had the power and capacity to advise

François, a storm was raised against Bussy that grew more furious every day, until it threatened to burst over his head.

There were public councils held to discuss the best method of intimidating the King's enemies, and private councils held to discuss the best method of exterminating them, when, at length, tidings came of the arrival of an ambassador from the Duc d'Anjou.

How did these tidings come? Who brought them? Who spread them?

It would be as easy to account for the tempestuous whirlwinds in the air, or the sandy whirlwinds on the plains, or the noisy whirlwinds in the streets.

There is a demon that attaches wings to certain rumors, and then sends them flying like eagles into space.

When the rumor of which we have spoken came flying into the Louvre the excitement was indescribable.

The King turned pale with anger, and the courtiers, as is usual with courtiers, aping the passion of their master in an exaggerated degree, turned livid.

They swore.

It would be difficult to repeat all the oaths they swore: but, among other things, they swore these:

If the ambassador were an old man, he should be hooted, scouted, fettered.

If he were a young man, he should be cloven in twain, bored through and through, cut into small pieces, which pieces should be distributed among the provinces of France as samples of the royal anger.

And the minions, according to their custom, began whetting their rapiers, taking lessons in fencing and practising against the walls with their daggers. But Chicot neither drew his sword from its scabbard nor his poniard from its sheath; on the contrary, he gave himself up to profound reflection.

And the King, seeing that Chicot was reflecting, remembered that, during a certain crisis, Chicot had been of the opinion of the queen mother, and that their joint opinion had been verified by events.

So the King saw that in Chicot was embodied the wisdom of his kingdom, and he questioned him on the subject under discussion.

"Sire," replied the Gascon, after long deliberation, "either the Duc d'Anjou sends you an ambassador or he does not."

"By my faith," said the King. "it was hardly worth while for you to make a hollow in your cheek with your fist in order to discover that fine dilemma."

"Patience, patience, as your august mother, whom God preserve, is in the habit of saying in Machiavelli's tongue: patience."

"Anybody can see that I have enough of that, since I am willing to hear you," retorted the King.

"If he send you an ambassador, it is because he believes he can do so; if he believe he can do so, it is because he feels he is strong; if he feel he is strong, we must walk warily. Respect the powerful, do your best to overreach them, but do not slight them. Always receive their ambassadors, and always show that you are delighted to receive them. That binds you to nothing. Do you remember how your brother embraced that simple Admiral Coligny, sent to him as ambassador by the Huguenots, who also believed that they were very powerful people?"

"Then you approve of the policy of my brother Charles?"

"No, no; let us understand each other. I quote a case in point, and I add: Do not harm a poor herald, clerk, or envoy, or ambassador. But rather, let us see if we cannot discover, later on, some way of nabbing the master, the mover, the leader, the most high and mighty prince, Monseigneur le Duc d'Anjou, the genuine, sole, and only culprit, and, of course, also the three Guises. Oh! sire, if we can then clap them into some securer hold than the Louvre, by all means let us do it."

"I rather like your suggestion," said Henri.

"Odstish! it does n't irritate you, then? Well, I'll go on."

"Go on."

"But in case he does n't send an ambassador, you must stop your friends from bellowing."

"Bellowing!"

"You understand; I would say 'roaring,' if any one were likely to take them for lions. I say 'bellowing' because — hold on, Henri — it really turns my stomach to look on while the young bucks, with about as much hair on their chins as on those of the monkeys in your menagerie, are playing at the game of ghosts like little brats of boys, and trying to frighten men by screaming: 'wow! wow!' If the Duc d'Anjou should send no ambassador, they're sure to fancy it

was because he was afraid of them, and there will be no standing them."

"Chicot, you seem to forget that the persons you speak of are my friends, my only friends."

"Wouldst wish me to win a thousand crowns, O my King?" answered Chicot.

"Speak."

"Bet with me that those fellows will remain faithful in spite of every temptation, and I will bet that before to-morrow I shall have won three out of the four of them over to myself and away from you, won them body and soul."

Chicot spoke with so much assurance that Henri did not reply. He reflected.

"Ah!" said Chicot; "so it 's your time for reflecting now, and you make a hollow in your charming little jaw with your charming little fist also. You have more sense, after all, than I have been in the habit of crediting you with, for you have an inkling of the truth, my son."

"Then what do you advise?"

"To wait, great King. The half of Solomon's wisdom lies in that word. If an ambassador come, bid him welcome; if no one come, do as you like. But as for your brother, if you take my advice, you will not allow him to be torn in pieces by your scapegraces. *Cordieu!* he 's a great blackguard himself; I know that well, but he is a Valois. Kill him if you find it to your interest; but, for the honor of your name, do not degrade him. He does that himself with wonderful ingenuity and without any one's help."

"It 's true, Chicot."

"One more lesson for which you are my debtor. Luckily for you, we have given up counting. Now let me sleep, Henri. A week ago I had for certain excellent reasons to send a monk under the table, and whenever I accomplish one of these noble achievements I have to keep half seas over myself for a week afterward."

"A monk! The worthy Genevievean you spoke about lately?"

"Correct. By the way, you promised him an abbey."

"I?"

"Of course, you. It 's the least you could do for him after all he has done for you."

"He is, then, still devoted to me?"

"He adores you. And by the way again, my son" —

"Well?"

"Corpus Christi will come in three weeks."

"And supposing it does?"

"I hope you are paving the way for some pretty little procession for us."

"I am the most Christian King, and it is my duty to set my people a religious example."

"And you will, as usual, do the stations in the four great convents of Paris?"

"As usual."

"The Abbey of Sainte Geneviève is one of them, is it not?"

"Undoubtedly; it is the second one I intend visiting."

"Good."

"Why do you ask me that?"

"Oh, for no reason at all. I was simply curious. Now I know what I wanted to know. Good-night, Henri."

But just as Chicot was making his preparations for a good sound nap, a great uproar was heard in the Louvre.

"What is that noise about?" inquired the King.

"Well, well!" sighed Chicot. "I am fated never to have a chance of sleeping, Henri."

"Oh, nonsense."

"You'll find it no nonsense. My son, you must hire me a room in the city, or I'll have to quit your service. Upon my sacred honor, the Louvre is habitable no longer!"

At this moment the captain of the guards entered; he looked quite scared.

"What is the matter?" inquired the King.

"Sire," replied the captain, "an envoy from M. le Duc d'Anjou has just entered the Louvre."

"With a suite?"

"No, alone."

"Then there is a twofold reason for receiving him graciously, Henri, for he is a brave man."

"Very well," said the King, trying to assume an air of calmness which his paleness belied, "very well, let all my court assemble in the grand hall, and let my valets attire me in black. A brother should be in mourning who is so unfortunate that he must treat with a brother through an ambassador!"

CHAPTER LXXVI.

WHICH IS ONLY THE CONTINUATION OF THE FOREGOING —
CURTAILED BY THE AUTHOR ON ACCOUNT OF IT BEING
NEAR THE END OF THE YEAR.

THE throne of Henri III. was in the grand hall.

Around this throne was grouped an agitated and tumultuous crowd.

The King was seated on it; he looked gloomy and there were wrinkles on his forehead.

All eyes were riveted on the gallery through which the captain of the guards would introduce the envoy.

"Sire," said Quélus, whispering in the King's ear, "do you know the name of this ambassador?"

"No; what is his name to me?"

"Sire, it is M. de Bussy; does not that fact treble the insult?"

"I cannot see where the insult lies," said Henri, trying to preserve his coolness.

"Your Majesty may not see it," said Schomberg, "but we see it plain enough."

Henri made no answer. He felt that anger and hatred were at work around his throne, and rejoiced that he had been able to place two ramparts of such strength between himself and his enemies.

Quélus, pale and red by turns, rested both his hands on the hilt of his rapier.

Schomberg took off his gloves and half drew his poniard from its sheath.

Maugiron buckled on his sword, which his page had handed to him.

D'Épernon twisted the ends of his mustache up to his eyes, but placed himself behind his companions.

As for Henri, like a hunter who hears his dogs yelping at a boar he let his favorites do as they pleased, and smiled.

"Show him in," said he.

At these words a deathlike silence pervaded the hall, though beneath that silence it seemed as if the hollow rumbling of the King's wrath might be heard.

Then a quick, firm step, accompanied by the jingling of

spurs, proudly rang on the flagstones, and sounded next in the gallery.

Bussy entered, hat in hand, his head erect, and his eyes calm.

None of those who surrounded the throne were able to attract the young man's haughty glance.

He advanced straight to Henri, made a profound inclination, and waited until he should be questioned, standing proudly before the throne, but with a pride wholly personal, the pride of the man of gentle birth, in which there can be nothing insulting to the majesty of a King.

"You here, M. de Bussy!" said Henri. "I believed you were away in Anjou."

"Sire," answered Bussy, "I was; but, as you see, I have left it."

"And what brings you to our capital?"

"The desire of presenting my humble respects to your Majesty."

The King and minions looked at one another; it was evident they had expected a different answer from a young man so impetuous.

"And for nothing else?" asked the King, in a rather stately manner.

"I will add, sire, that I have been ordered by his highness the Duc d'Anjou, my master, to unite his respects to mine."

"And the duke said nothing else?"

"He said that, being about to accompany the queen mother to Paris, he desired that your Majesty should be apprised of the return of one of your most faithful subjects."

The King was so astonished that he was unable, for a time, to continue his questions.

Chicot took advantage of the interruption to approach the ambassador.

"Good day, M. de Bussy," said he.

Bussy turned round, surprised to find a single friend in this assembly.

"Ah! M. Chicot, I am heartily glad to meet you," replied Bussy; "how is M. de Saint-Luc?"

"Oh, very well; I saw him out walking with his wife some time ago."

"So that is all you have to tell me, M. de Bussy?" inquired the King.

"Yes, sire; if there is any other important intelligence, the

Duc d'Anjou will have the honor of imparting it to you himself."

"Very well," said the King.

And, rising silently, he descended the two steps of his throne.

The audience was over, the different groups broke up.

Bussy noticed from the corner of his eye that the four minions had advanced and stationed themselves around him, forming as it were a living circle of fury and menace.

At the end of the hall, the King and his chancellor were talking in whispers.

Bussy feigned to remark nothing out of the way and continued his conversation with Chicot.

Then, as if he had entered into the plot and had come to the resolution of isolating Bussy, the King called out:

"Come here, Chicot, I have something to say to you."

Chicot saluted Bussy with a polished courtesy which showed that his claims to gentle birth were well founded.

Bussy returned the salutation with equal graciousness, and was then alone in the circle around him.

Thereupon, he changed his manner and the expression of his countenance; he had been calm before the King, polite with Chicot; now he became condescending.

Seeing Quélus approaching:

"Ah! good day, M. de Quélus," said he: "may I have the honor of asking how are you and your friends?"

"Rather poorly, monsieur," replied Quélus.

"Dear me!" cried Bussy, apparently much affected by this answer; "and pray, what has happened?"

"Something that troubles us greatly," replied Quélus.

"Something?" exclaimed Bussy, amazed. "Surely you and your friends are strong enough, you, especially, M. de Quélus, to rid yourselves of this 'something'?"

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Maugiron, thrusting Schomberg aside, who was also advancing to take part in a conversation that promised to be interesting. "it is not some *thing*, but some *person*, that M. de Quélus was alluding to."

"But if some one troubles M. de Quélus, why does he not thrust him aside in the manner you thrust some one aside just now?"

"The very advice that I gave him, M. de Bussy, and I believe Quélus has determined to follow it," said Schomberg.

"Ah, it is you. M. de Schomberg," said Bussy. "I had not the honor of recognizing you."

"Perhaps because my face is still a little blue," said Schomberg.

"No, you are very pale, on the contrary; I hope you are not indisposed, monsieur?"

"Monsieur," said Schomberg, "if I am pale it is with anger."

"Ah! really! why, then, you must, like M. de Quélus, be also troubled by some thing or by some one?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"He is like myself; for there is also some one that troubles me," said Maugiron.

"Always witty, my dear M. de Maugiron," said Bussy; "but, in good sooth, gentlemen, the more I look at you, the more do your dejected faces absorb my attention."

"You forget me, monsieur," said D'Épernon, planting himself haughtily in front of Bussy.

"Pardon me, M. d'Épernon; you were, as usual, behind the others, and I have the misfortune of knowing you so slightly that it was not for me to be the first to speak."

The position of Bussy, so careless and smiling, in the centre of those four young desperadoes whose eyes spoke with terrible eloquence, was a curious spectacle.

Not to understand their purpose, it behooved a man to be either stupid or blind.

To look as if he did not understand it, it behooved a man to be a Bussy.

He was silent for a time, with the same smile playing on his lips.

Quélus, who was the first to grow impatient, stamped on the floor and shouted:

"This must have an end!"

Bussy raised his eyes to the ceiling and looked round.

"Monsieur," said he, "have you ever remarked what an echo there is in this hall? The reverberations of marble walls are singularly distinct, and words become doubly sonorous under stuccoed ceilings; while, in the open country, sounds are disseminated, and, I give you my word of honor, it is my impression that the clouds catch up a part of them. My theory is based on something in Aristophanes. Have you read Aristophanes, gentlemen?"

Maugiron fancied that the words of Bussy contained a challenge and he went up to him and attempted to whisper something in his ear.

Bussy stopped him.

"No whisperings, I beg, monsieur," said Bussy; "his Majesty is very sensitive and might take it into his head we were talking scandal about him."

Maugiron withdrew, more furious than ever.

Schomberg took his place, and, said in a dogged tone:

"I am a very dull, obtuse German, but I am also very frank. I speak loud, to give those who listen every chance to hear me; but when my words, which I try to render as distinct as possible, are not understood, because he to whom they are addressed is deaf or does not choose to understand them, then I" —

"You?" said Bussy, fastening on the young man, whose hand trembled with excitement, one of those looks that flash from the fathomless eyes of tigers; looks that seem to leap from an abyss and to emit torrents of flames. "You?"

Schomberg stopped.

Bussy shrugged his shoulders, whirled round on his heel, and turned his back on him.

He found himself facing D'Épernon.

D'Épernon had gone too far to be able to draw back.

"Why, gentlemen," said he, "do you notice how provincial M. de Bussy has become since he bolted with M. d'Anjou? He has a beard and no sword-knot, black boots and a gray hat!"

"The very thing I was thinking myself, my dear M. d'Épernon. When I saw you in such splendid attire, I wondered at the depths into which a few days' absence will force a man to descend. Now, here am I, — I, Louis de Bussy, Seigneur de Clermont, — compelled to take lessons in taste from a little Gascon squire. But let me pass, I entreat. You are so close to me that you have trodden on my toes — and M. de Quélus has done so also; I felt the pressure in spite of my boots," he added, with his charming smile.

Thereupon, Bussy, passing between D'Épernon and Quélus, held out his hand to Saint-Luc, who had just entered.

The hand Saint-Luc grasped was dripping with perspiration.

He saw that something out of the way was happening, and drew Bussy out of the group and then out of the hall.

A strange murmur rose among the minions and spread to the other groups of courtiers.

"It's incredible," said Quélus, "I insulted him, and he did not answer!"

"And I," said Maugiron, "challenged him, and he did not answer!"

"And I," said Schomberg, "shook my fist in his face, and he did not answer!"

"And I," said D'Épernon, "trod on his toes, yes, actually trod on his toes, and he did not answer!"

And he looked as if the size of the foot he trod on added to his own stature.

"Clearly, he did not want to understand," said Quélus. "There is something underneath this."

"I know what it is, yes I do!" said Schomberg, — "know for sure!"

"And what is it, then?"

"He knew that we four could kill him, and he doesn't like being killed."

At that moment the King approached his young gentlemen, Chicot whispering in his ear.

"Well?" he asked; "what was M. de Bussy saying? I thought I heard some rather loud talk in this quarter."

"You would like to know what M. de Bussy was saying, sire?" inquired D'Épernon.

"Yes, you are aware I am just a little inquisitive," replied Henri, with a smile.

"Upon my faith, sire, he said nothing to brag about," answered Quélus. "Sire, he is no longer a Parisian!"

"And what is he, then?"

"A clown. He steps aside to let his betters pass."

"Oh! nonsense!" returned the King; "what does that mean?"

"It means I am going to train a dog to bite his calves," answered Quélus; "and yet — who knows? — likely enough he won't feel it through his boots."

"And I have a quintain at home," said Schomberg, "I think I'll call it Bussy."

"And I'll go a little farther," said D'Épernon. "To-day I trod on his toes, to-morrow I'll slap his face. He is a sham hero, a hero in his own conceit; he says to himself, 'I have

fought for the sake of honor; now I'll be prudent for the sake of life."

"What!" cried Henri, in pretended anger, "you have dared to ill use one of my brother's gentlemen in the very Louvre, in my own house?"

"Alas! yes," answered Maugiron, replying with affected humility to the King's affected indignation, "and although we have ill used him very seriously, I give you my solemn word he never answered."

The King turned to Chicot, with a smile, and whispered in his ear:

"Still bellowing, are they, Chicot, eh? Hem! I think they have roared to some purpose, eh?"

"Or, perhaps, they have mewed," said Chicot. "I am acquainted with people who will shiver like an aspen when they hear your pussy's caterwaulings. Perhaps M. de Bussy is one of them. And now you know why he left without answering."

"You think so?" said the King.

"Those who live will see," answered Chicot, sententiously.

"Talk away," said Henri; "it's a case of 'like master, like man.'"

"Do you mean by these words, sire, that Bussy is your brother's serving-man? You were never more mistaken in your life."

"Gentlemen," said Henri, "I am going to dine in the Queen's apartments. Good-by. The *Gelosi*¹ will play a farce for our amusement. I invite you to see it."

The courtiers inclined respectfully, and the King passed out through the great door.

At that very moment Saint-Luc entered through the little door.

He stopped with a gesture the four gentlemen, who were also going out.

"I beg your pardon, M. de Quélus," said he, with a bow, "are you still living in the Rue Sainte-Honoré?"

"Yes, my dear friend, why do you ask?" inquired Quélus.

"I have a few words to say to you."

"Ah! indeed!"

"Might I venture to ask what is your address also, M. de Schomberg?"

¹ Italian actors who gave their performances in the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

"I live in the Rue de Béthisy," said Schomberg, astonished.

"D'Épernon, I know yours, I think."

"Rue de Grenelle."

"You are my neighbor — And you, Maugiron?"

"I live in the Louvre quarter."

"I shall begin with you, if you will permit me — or — excuse me — with Quélus."

"I have it! at least, I think I understand. You come on the part of M. de Bussy?"

"I need not say on whose part I have come; I have to speak with you, that is all."

"With the whole four of us?"

"Yes."

"Very well. But as you may not wish to speak with us in the Louvre, and I presume you do not care to do so, as it is hardly the proper place to discuss such matters, we had better assemble in one of our houses. There we can all learn what you have to say to each of us individually."

"I am satisfied."

"Then, let us go to Schomberg's; it is within a few yards of us."

"Yes, let us go to my house in the Rue de Béthisy," said the young man.

"Very well," answered Saint-Luc, with another bow.

"Please show us the way, M. de Schomberg."

"With great pleasure."

The five gentlemen passed out of the Louvre, arm in arm, and formed a line which occupied the entire width of the street.

Behind them marched their lackeys armed to the teeth.

When they reached the Rue de Béthisy and entered the Hôtel de Schomberg, the German went upstairs to see that the grand drawing-room was prepared for their reception. Saint-Luc stopped in the antechamber.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

HOW M. DE SAINT-LUC FULFILLED THE COMMISSION GIVEN HIM BY BUSSY.

Let us leave Saint-Luc for a moment in Schomberg's ante-chamber, and turn our attention to what had passed between him and Bussy.

Bussy had, as we have already mentioned, left the audience chamber with his friend, after bowing courteously to all those who were not inclined to curry favor with the King at the expense of arousing the anger of so redoubtable a personage as the valiant count.

In that age of brutal force, when personal efficiency was everything, a man, if he were vigorous and adroit, could carve a little moral and physical realm for himself out of this fair realm of France.

And so, after a fashion, Bussy was a king in the court of King Henry III.

But on the day in question, Bussy had not been very well received in his kingdom.

Once outside the hall, Saint-Luc had halted and looked anxiously at his face.

"Are you really ill, my friend?" he asked. "In fact, you are so pale that you look as if you were ready to faint."

"No," said Bussy, "but I am fairly stifling with anger."

"Oh, nonsense. Surely you don't mind the gabble of those coxcombs?"

"*Corbleu!* my dear friend, you'll soon see whether I mind it or not."

"Come, come, now, Bussy, be calm."

"You are a nice fellow to talk of calmness. If they had said to you the half of what they said to me, I think, from what I know of you, there would be at least one dead man lying round somewhere by this time."

"Well, what do you desire?"

"You are my friend, Saint-Luc, and have given me a terrible proof of your friendship."

"Ah! my dear friend," said Saint-Luc, who believed Monsoreau dead and buried, "the affair is n't worth talking about;

why speak of it, then? Don't, or you'll vex me. Certainly, it was a pretty little lunge, and succeeded to a marvel. But I don't deserve any credit; it was the King showed it to me during the time he kept me locked up in the Louvre."

"My dear friend" —

"Let us leave Monsoreau where he is and talk of Diane. Did she take it in good part, the poor little dear? Has she pardoned me? When will the wedding be? and when will the christening be?"

"Ah! my good friend, we must wait for all that until Monsoreau is dead."

"What do you mean?" cried Saint-Luc, starting back as if he had trodden on a pointed nail.

"Alas! my dear friend, beds of poppies are not so dangerous as you once believed, and a person does not always die when he falls on top of one of them. On the contrary, the person in question lives, and is madder than ever."

"Bah! you're not serious?"

"Serious! Heavens! don't I wish I weren't! He talks of nothing but vengeance, and swears to kill you on the first opportunity. That's how the matter stands at present."

"He lives?"

"Alas! yes."

"And what confounded ass of a doctor attended him?"

"My own doctor, dear friend."

"Heavens and earth! I'll never get over it!" cried Saint-Luc, utterly crushed by this revelation. "Zounds, man, I'm dishonored forever! And I told everybody about it! and all his heirs are no doubt now wearing mourning! The rascal! to give me the lie in this fashion! But I won't stand it. I'll catch on to him somewhere, and at our next meeting it is n't one hole I'll make in him — four, if necessary."

"Pray, be calm, my dear Saint-Luc," said Bussy, "it's your turn now to receive a little advice. Really, I am better off than you imagine. Only think of it! Monsoreau fancies it was the duke that sent you to make away with him; and so it is of the duke he is jealous. On the other hand, I am an angel, a precious friend, a Bayard. I am his 'dear Bussy,' in a word. Quite-natural, you see, for it was that dunderhead of a Rémy that cured him."

"How did such an idiotic idea get into his head?"

"Oh, the thing is simple enough; such ideas do get into the

heads of honest men. He fancies it is a doctor's duty to cure people."

"Why, the fellow must be a visionary, then!"

"But, as I was about to say, Monsoreau believes he owes his life to me, and has asked me to take care of his wife."

"Ah! I can see now why you await his death with such composure. But your news has struck me all of a heap, I can tell you!"

"My dear friend!"

"Yes, upon my honor. What you tell me takes away my breath."

"You see that at present we need not trouble ourselves about Monsoreau."

"Right. Let us enjoy life as long as he is on the sick list. But the moment I hear he is out of bed, I shall order myself a suit of mail and put iron shutters on all my windows. And you will find out from the Duc d'Anjou whether his excellent mother has not given him some receipt or other for an antidote against poisons. You will? In the meantime, my dear fellow, why not have all the diversion we can?"

Bussy could not help smiling; he linked his arm in Saint-Luc's.

"So, my dear Saint-Luc," said he, "you see you have only done me half a service!"

Saint-Luc stared at him in amazement.

"Yes, after all, you're right. Do you want me to put the finishing touch on my work? I should n't altogether like it; but for you, my dear Bussy, there are a good many things I would do, particularly if he should look at me out of that jaundiced eye of his, — faugh!"

"No, no. As I said, we need not trouble ourselves about Monsoreau at present. If you think you owe me a debt, you can pay it in another way" —

"Well, go on, I am listening."

"How do you stand with the minions?"

"Faith, we are something like cats and dogs in the sunlight. As long as it gives heat to the whole of us, we have nothing to quarrel about; but if one take any portion of the warmth and light from the other — oh! then I would not answer for the consequences."

"Is it so? My friend, what you say delights me."

"Ah! so much the better."

"Suppose a sunbeam be intercepted?"

"Suppose it is. Granted."

"In that case you will show me your beautiful white teeth, stretch out your formidable claws, and then the fun will begin."

"I don't quite understand."

Bussy smiled.

"Well, my dear friend, will you go for me to M. de Quélus?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Saint-Luc.

"You are beginning to understand, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Capital. You will ask him what day it will please him that I should cut his throat or he mine."

"I will do so."

"You do not mind it?"

"Not the least in the world. I will go whenever you wish — immediately, if you like."

"A moment. After calling on M. de Quélus, you will next make the same proposal to M. de Schomberg, will you not?"

"Ah!" cried Saint-Luc, "M. de Schomberg also! What a devil of a man you are, Bussy!"

Bussy made a gesture that did not admit of reply.

"Agreed," said Saint-Luc; "thy will be done."

"Then, my dear Saint-Luc, as you are so amiable," continued Bussy, "I will ask you to visit M. de Maugiron — he is on guard at the Louvre, for I saw he had on his gorget — and request him to join the party, will you not?"

"Oh, three! you cannot mean it, Bussy! Well, I hope that's all, at least?"

"By no means."

"What! not all?"

"From there you will go to M. d'Épernon. I do not ask you to trouble your head much about him, for, in my eyes, he is a very poor creature; but, then, he will make up the number!"

Saint-Luc dropped his arms in dismay and stared at Bussy.

"Four!" he murmured.

"You are quite correct, my dear friend," said Bussy, nodding assent; "four. I need not recommend a person of your intelligence, valôr, and courtesy to display, in regard to these gentlemen, all that amiability and politeness which you possess in so high a degree" —

"Oh! my dear friend" —

"I am fully persuaded that the whole affair will be managed by you in a chivalrous fashion, in the manner befitting persons of our high rank. Am I not right?"

"You shall be content, my friend."

Bussy offered his hand, with a smile, to Saint-Luc.

"I am sure of it," said he. "Ah! my worthy minions, you'll find out, perhaps, that they laugh best who laugh last!"

"And now, my dear friend, the conditions."

"What conditions?"

"Yours."

"I make none. I accept the conditions of the minions."

"Your weapons?"

"The weapons of the minions."

"The day, the place, the hour?"

"The day, the place, the hour of the minions."

"But" —

"Oh, let us dismiss such trifles. Act, and act quickly, my dear friend. I shall be in the little garden of the Louvre, where you will find me as soon as your mission is accomplished."

"Then you intend waiting for me there?"

"Yes."

"Well, do so. But, egad, you may have to stay there a considerable time."

"I have plenty of time."

We know now how it came to pass that Saint-Luc went in search of the four minions, found them all still in the Louvre, and engaged them in conversation.

It is now time to return to Bussy's friend, whom we left in the antechamber of the Hôtel de Schomberg, waiting, according to the laws of etiquette then in vogue, until the royal favorites, who were pretty certain of the purpose of his visit, should be formally installed, each in one of the four corners of the vast drawing-room.

When this ceremony was accomplished, the folding-doors were flung wide open, and an usher came and saluted Saint-Luc, who, with his right hand, in which he held his hat, resting on his hip, and his left pressing the hilt of his rapier, which gracefully tilted up his cloak, marched to the centre of the threshold and then halted.

"M. d'Espinay de Saint-Luc!" cried the usher.

Whereupon Saint-Luc entered.

Schomberg, as master of the house, rose and proceeded to meet his guest, who, instead of saluting, put on his hat.

This formality marked the character of the visit.

Schomberg replied by bowing a second time; then, turning to Quélus:

"I have the honor to present to you," said he, "M. Jacques de Lévis, Comte de Quélus."

Saint-Luc took a step toward Quélus, and, with a profound inclination, said:

"I was looking for you, monsieur."

Quélus saluted.

Schomberg turned to another corner of the hall, saying:

"I have the honor to present to you M. Louis de Maugiron."

Same salutations by Saint-Luc and Maugiron.

"I was looking for you, monsieur," said Saint-Luc.

A similar ceremony was gone through in the same cold and impassive manner with D'Épernon.

Then it was the turn of Schomberg, who presented himself and received the same reply.

When these preliminaries were finished, the four friends sat down, while Saint-Luc continued to stand.

"M. le Comte," said he to Quélus, "you have insulted M. le Comte Louis de Clermont d'Amboise, Seigneur de Bussy, who presents you his very humble compliments, and begs you to meet him in single combat, on such a day and at such an hour as may suit your convenience, in order that you may fight with such weapons as you may choose, until death ensue — Do you accept?"

"Yes, certainly," answered Quélus, "and M. le Comte de Bussy does me great honor."

"Your day, M. le Comte?"

"I have no preference — only, I should prefer to-morrow to the day after to-morrow, and the day after that to any later date."

"Your hour?"

"In the morning."

"Your weapons?"

"Rapier and poniard, if M. de Bussy do not object."

Saint-Luc bowed.

"Whatever you decide on that point," said he, "is law to M. de Bussy."

Afterward, the same formality was gone through with the three others.

"But," said Schomberg, who, as master of the house, had been the last to be addressed and to answer, "there is one thing we have not thought of, M. de Saint-Luc. It is that if we were all pleased to choose the same day and the same hour — and chance sometimes brings about strange eventualities — M. de Bussy would be rather embarrassed."

M. de Saint-Luc saluted, smiling in his courtliest manner.

"Certainly," said he; "M. de Bussy might be embarrassed, as must any other gentleman in a combat with four valiant men like you. But he says the incident would have no novelty for him, as it has already happened at Les Tournelles, near the Bastile."

"And he would fight us all four?" said D'Épernon.

"All four," answered Saint-Luc.

"Separately?" inquired Schomberg.

"Separately or together; the challenge is for all, individually or collectively."

The four young men looked at one another. Quélus was the first to break silence.

"M. de Bussy's offer is very fine," said he, crimson with rage. "but, however insignificant he may deem us, we can each perform our task singly. We will accept the count's proposal, then, and fight him separately, or, what would be better still" —

Quélus looked round at his companions, who, doubtless understanding his meaning, nodded their heads in assent.

"Or, what would be still better," he repeated, "as we do not want to assassinate a gallant man, let chance decide which of us is to fight M. de Bussy."

"But," said D'Épernon, quickly, "what about the three others?"

"The three others! Surely, M. de Bussy has too many friends and we too many enemies for the three others to be obliged to stand with their arms folded.

"Is that your opinion, gentlemen?" he asked, looking at each in turn.

"Yes," said they all, in unison.

"It would give me the greatest pleasure, in fact," said Schomberg, "if M. de Bussy invited M. de Livarot to our festival."

"If I might venture to express a wish on the subject," said Maugiron, "I should desire M. de Balzac d'Entragues to be of the party."

"And the party would be complete," said Quélus, "if M. de Ribeirac graciously consented to accompany his friends."

"Gentlemen," said Saint-Luc, "I will transmit your wishes to M. le Comte de Bussy, and I think I may assure you in advance that he is too courteous not to comply with them. It only remains for me, then, to thank you most sincerely in the name of M. de Bussy."

Saint-Luc bowed anew, and the four gentlemen who had just been challenged lowered their heads to the same level as his.

The minions then escorted Saint-Luc to the door of the apartment.

He found the four lackeys in the last antechamber.

He took his purse and flung it among them, saying:

"To enable you to drink to your masters' health."

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

SHOWING HOW SAINT-LUC WAS MORE CIVILIZED THAN BUSSY,
THE LESSONS HE GAVE HIM, AND THE USE MADE OF
THEM BY THE FAIR DIANE'S LOVER.

SAINT-LUC returned, proud of having executed his commission so well.

Bussy was waiting for him and thanked him.

Saint-Luc perceived that he was very sad, and this was not natural in the case of so brave a man at the news of a glorious duel.

"Have I managed badly?" said Saint-Luc; "you seem quite put out."

"By my faith, my dear friend, I regret that, instead of appointing another day, you did not say: 'at once.'"

"Ah! patience, the Angevines haven't come yet. Why the devil won't you give them time to come? And then, I don't see why you should be in such a hurry to pile up a heap of dead and dying people."

"It is because I wish to die as soon as possible."

Saint-Luc stared at Bussy in utter amazement.

"Die at your age! and with such a mistress and such a name?"

"Yes, I know I shall kill the whole four of them; but I am also sure of receiving a cut or thrust myself that will ensure me peace for all eternity."

"What black ideas are these?"

"I'd just like to see you in my case! A husband I thought dead, and now he's alive and kicking; a woman never able to leave the bedside of this sham corpse. Never to see her, never to smile on her, never to touch her hand. *Mordieu!* how I wish I could make mincemeat of some one — I don't care whom!"

The answer to this sally was a roar of laughter from Saint-Luc that scattered a whole flock of sparrows who were pecking at the fruit of a tree in the little garden of the Louvre.

"Ah!" cried he, "did one ever see such an artless creature! And to think that all the women are in love with this Bussy! Why, he's a schoolboy! But, my dear friend, you really are losing your senses: there is not in the whole world as lucky a lover as you."

"Oh! indeed! Well, prove me that, thou married man."

"*Nihil facilius*, as used to say my old pedagogue, the Jesuit Triquet. Are you not Monsoreau's friend?"

"Yes, faith; though on account of my respect for the human understanding, I'm ashamed to confess it. Yes, that clown calls me friend."

"Well! be his friend."

"Oh! and abuse such a title!"

"*Prorsus absurdum*, would answer Triquet again. Is he really your friend?"

"Well, he says he is."

"He can't be, since he renders you unhappy. Now, the end of friendship is to make men happy in their relations to one another. At least, so his Majesty defines friendship, and the King is a scholar."

Bussy burst out laughing.

"Allow me to continue," Saint-Luc went on. "If he renders you unhappy he is not your friend. Therefore, you may treat him as a stranger, and take his wife from him; or as an enemy, and kill him, if he make any objection."

"In fact," said Bussy, "I detest him."

"And he is afraid of you."

"Do you think he does not like me?"

"Egad, find out. Take his wife from him and you'll see."

"Is that, too, the logic of Father Triquet?"

"No, it's mine."

"Allow me to compliment you on it."

"You like it?"

"No, I prefer to be a man of honor."

"And let Madame de Monsoreau cure her husband both physically and morally, for it is certain that if you get yourself killed she will become attached to the only man left her."

Bussy frowned.

"But, at any rate," added Saint-Luc, "here comes Madame de Saint-Luc, and her advice is worth having. After gathering a nosegay in the queen mother's garden, she will be in the best of humor. Listen to her; her words are golden."

He had hardly finished when Jeanne appeared, radiant with happiness and as arch and roguish as ever.

Hers was one of those winsome natures that, like the lark soaring over the plains, awakens joy and hope in the hearts of all within its reach.

Bussy saluted her cordially.

She offered him her hand, which is a convincing proof that this mode of greeting existed before our ambassador, Abbé Dubois, was said to have brought it with him from England with the treaty of the Triple Alliance.

"And how is your love affair progressing?" she asked, as she tied her flowers with a golden thread.

"Sinking into the grave," said Bussy.

"Oh, nonsense," answered Saint-Luc, "it is only wounded or in a fainting-fit. I am ready to wager that Jeanne will restore the patient to life, won't you, Jeanne?"

"But," said she, "I must first see the wound."

"In two words," said Saint-Luc, "this is the gist of the matter: Bussy objects to being on friendly terms with Monsoreau and has decided to withdraw."

"And forsake Diane?" cried Jeanne, in terror.

Bussy was moved by her emotion and added:

"Ah! madame, Saint-Luc has not told you that I wish for death."

Jeanne gazed at him for a moment with a compassion that was not altogether saint-like.

"Poor Diane!" she murmured. "Oh! the value of love! What ingrates men are!"

"Capital!" exclaimed Saint-Luc. "Now you have a touch of the morality of my wife."

"I an ingrate!" cried Bussy, "and all because I refuse to degrade my love by practising a disgraceful hypocrisy!"

"Oh, monsieur, that is but a discreditable pretence," said Jeanne. "If you were really in love, the only degradation you would fear would be that of being no longer loved."

"Aha!" said Saint-Luc, "you're catching it, my friend."

"But, madame," cried Bussy, passionately, "there are sacrifices that" —

"Not another word. Confess you love Diane no longer. It will be more worthy of a man with any chivalry in him."

Bussy turned pale at the mere thought.

"You do not dare to say so to her? Then I will."

"Madame! madame!"

"Oh, you are splendid fellows, you men, you and your sacrifices — And do we make no sacrifices? What! she exposes herself to the danger of being murdered by that tiger Monsoreau; she preserves all her rights by the display of a strength of will to which a Samson and a Hannibal were strangers; she tames a ferocious beast, and all that she may harness herself to the chariot wheels of the triumphant gentleman before me, — and that is not heroism? Oh! I call Heaven to witness that Diane is sublime, and I should not have been able to do a quarter of what she does every day."

"Thank you," answered Saint-Luc, with a most reverential bow, at which Jeanne burst out laughing.

Bussy hesitated.

"And he reflects!" cries Jeanne; "he does not fall on his knees and say his *mea culpa*!"

"You are right," said Bussy. "I am only a man, that is to say, an imperfect creature, and inferior to the most commonplace woman."

"It is very fortunate," said Jeanne; "that you are convinced at last."

"What do you order me to do?"

"Go and visit" —

"M. de Monsoreau?"

"Who is talking of Monsoreau? — Diane."

"But they are always together, as far as I can see."

"When you used to visit Madame de Barbezieux did she not always have that big monkey of hers beside her, and did it not bite you because it was jealous?"

Bussy had to laugh, Saint-Luc imitated him, and Jeanne followed suit. Their laughter was so noisy that it brought all the courtiers walking in the galleries of the Louvre to the windows.

"Madame," said Bussy, at length, "I am going to the Hôtel de Monsoreau. Adieu."

Thereupon they separated, after Bussy had warned Saint-Luc to say nothing of the impending duel with the minions.

He found Monsoreau in bed.

The count uttered an exclamation of pleasure as soon as he saw him.

Rémy had just promised him that his wound would heal in three weeks.

Diane laid a finger on her lips: it was her manner of saluting her lover.

Bussy had to relate to Monsoreau the entire history of the commission entrusted to him by the Duc d'Anjou, his visit to the court, the King's ungracious reception, and the coldness shown him by the minions.

"Coldness" was the word used by Bussy. Diane was forced to laugh.

These tidings rendered Monsoreau very thoughtful. He requested Bussy to bring his face close to his, and whispered in his ear.

"There is some scheme or other under all this, is there not?"

"I believe so," answered Bussy.

"Take my advice," said the grand huntsman. "Do not get into trouble for the sake of that base villain. I know him; he is treacherous; capable of the blackest perfidy, I assure you."

"I know it," answered Bussy, with a smile which reminded the count of the occasion upon which his new friend had been a sufferer from the duke's double dealing.

"You see," resumed Monsoreau, "you are my friend and I wish to put you on your guard. I hope you will ask my advice every time you are in a difficult position."

"Monsieur! monsieur!" cried Rémy. "You must really go to sleep now, as you have had your wound dressed. Come, come, go to sleep."

•

"Yes, my dear doctor. My friend, be kind enough to take a turn in the garden with Madame de Monsoreau. I am told it is charming at this time of the year."

"I am at your orders," replied Bussy.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

THE PRECAUTIONS OF M. DE MONSOREAU.

SAINT LUC was right. Jeanne was right; Bussy saw this at the end of the week and did them full justice.

Bussy had often thought what a grand and glorious thing it would be to have been a hero of antiquity. But, if he had been a hero of antiquity, he should now be a very old man, and Bussy, forgetful of Plutarch, who had ceased to be his favorite author ever since love had corrupted him; Bussy, as handsome as Alcibiades; Bussy, caring for nothing except the present, had little liking for historical articles dealing with the continence of Scipio or Bayard.

Diane was more simple, more of a child of nature, as we say to-day. She was entirely swayed by two instincts which the misanthropical Figaro tells us are innate in the female species: love and deception. She had never had the least idea of making her opinions on what Charron and Montaigne call *honesté* a subject of philosophical speculation.

To love Bussy was her logic; to belong to Bussy, her ethics; to thrill in every fibre of her body at the slightest touch of his hand, her metaphysics.

Since the fortnight when the accident had occurred, M. de Monsoreau had been growing better and better. He had escaped fever, thanks to the application of cold water, — a new remedy revealed by chance, or rather by Providence, to Ambroise Paré, — when he suddenly experienced a fresh shock: he learned that the Duc d'Anjou had just arrived at Paris with the queen mother and his Angevines.

There was some reason for the count's uneasiness: the day after his arrival, the prince, under the pretext of inquiring after the grand huntsman's health, entered his hôtel in the Rue des Petits-Pères. You cannot very well close your doors in the face of a princely personage who gives you such proof

of a tender interest in your condition. M. de Monsoreau received the prince, who was most amiable to M. de Monsoreau, but particularly amiable to M. de Monsoreau's wife.

As soon as the duke was gone, Monsoreau called for Diane, and, in spite of the remonstrances of Rémy, walked thrice around his armchair, leaning on her arm.

After this, he sat down again in the same armchair, around which, as we have said, he had just traced a triple line of circumvallation. He looked as if he was well pleased, and Diane guessed from his smile that he was plotting some underhand manœuvre.

But this matter has to do with the private history of the house of Monsoreau.

Let us return, then, to the arrival of the Duc d'Anjou, which belongs to the epic portion of our narrative.

The day when Monseigneur François de Valois made his entry into the Louvre was, as may be easily imagined, a very interesting day to those who witnessed it.

And this is what they saw :

Great arrogance in the behavior of the King.

Great indifference in the behavior of the queen mother.

A sort of humble insolence in the behavior of the Duc d'Anjou, who seemed to be saying :

“ Why the devil did you recall me, if you look so sourly on me now that I am here ? ”

This ungracious reception was rendered still more interesting by the furious, flaming, devouring looks of Messieurs Livarot, Ribeirac, and Entragues, who, having been forewarned by Bussy, were delighted to show their future adversaries, that, if no obstacle to the duel came from the minions, assuredly none should come on their side.

On that day, Chicot moved about more actively than Cæsar on the eve of the battle of Pharsalia.

And then matters settled down quietly enough.

Two days after his return to the Louvre, François paid a second visit to the Comte de Monsoreau.

The grand huntsman had been informed of the nature of the duke's interview with his brother in its slightest details, and did his best, by voice and gesture, to inflame the former's animosity toward the King.

The grand huntsman was improving every day, and, when the prince departed, he took the arm of his wife again, and,

instead of walking thrice round his chair, he walked once round the apartment.

Then he sat down, and looked even better pleased than on the first occasion.

That same evening Diane warned Bussy that it was quite certain M. de Monsoreau had some scheme or other in his head.

A moment after, Monsoreau and Bussy were alone.

"When I think," said Monsoreau to Bussy, "that this prince, who looks so sweet upon me, is my deadly enemy, and is the prime mover in Saint-Luc's attempt to assassinate me" —

"Assassinate you!" exclaimed Bussy. "Oh! monsieur, that is going too far. Saint-Luc is an honorable gentleman, and you have acknowledged yourself that you challenged him, were the first to draw, and received your wound while fighting."

"I agree to all that, but it is not the less true he acted at the instigation of the Duc d'Anjou."

"Listen," said Bussy, "I know the duke, but I know Saint-Luc better. I must tell you Saint-Luc is entirely devoted to the King and anything but devoted to the prince. If your wound, indeed, had come from Antraguët, Livarot, or Ribeirac, I could understand — but from Saint-Luc" —

"You do not know the history of France as I know it, my dear M. de Bussy," said Monsoreau, stubborn in his opinion.

Bussy might have answered that, though he did not know the history of France, he was perfectly well acquainted with the history of Anjou, especially with that of a corner of it called Méridor.

At length the time came when Monsoreau was able to rise and walk in the garden.

"I am well enough now," said he, as he was returning with Remy: "this evening we shall change our quarters."

"Why so?" asked the doctor. "Do you consider the air of the Rue des Petits-Pères bad for you, or do you want more society?"

"On the contrary, I have too much society," said Monsoreau. "M. d'Anjou wearies me with his visits: he is always accompanied by thirty of his gentlemen, and the jingling of their spurs irritates my nerves."

"But where are you going?"

"I have ordered my little house at Les Tournelles to be got ready."

Bussy and Diane, for Bussy was always present, exchanged a look of loving remembrance.

"What! that hovel!" cried Rémy, thoughtlessly.

"Ah! you know it, then?" said Monsoreau.

"*Pardieu!* who doesn't know the abodes of the grand huntsman of France, and, especially, one who has lived in the Rue Beautrellis?"

Monsoreau was naturally mistrustful, and some vague suspicion arose in his mind.

"Yes, yes, I will go there," said he: "I shall feel quite at my ease in the little house. Four persons are as many as it can hold conveniently. It is a fortress, and I can see from the windows any one who comes to visit me three hundred yards off."

"So that" — inquired Rémy.

"So that I can refuse to receive him if I wish, particularly when I am completely recovered."

Bussy bit his lips; he feared there might come a time when he would refuse to receive him.

Diane sighed. She remembered the time when she had seen Bussy lying wounded and in a deathlike swoon upon her bed.

Rémy was reflecting; consequently, he was the first of the three to speak.

"You cannot," said he.

"And why, if you please, M. le Docteur?"

"Because a grand huntsman of France must hold receptions, must keep up a great train of attendants, must have any number of equipages. No one will wonder if he have a palace for his dogs — but a kennel for himself! impossible!"

"Hum!" muttered Monsoreau, in a tone that said plainly: "That is true."

"And then," continued Rémy, "for I am a doctor of the mind as well as of the body, — it is not your staying here that troubles you."

"What is it, pray?"

"It is madame's staying here."

"Well?"

"Well, send the countess away."

"Part from my wife!" cried Monsoreau, in a voice in which there was certainly more anger than love.

"Then part from your office, resign your post as grand

hunter. I think it would be wise; you will either fulfil your duties or you will not; if you do not, you displease the King; if you"—

"I will do what I have to do, but I will not leave the countess," said Monsoreau, from between his closed teeth.

No sooner were the words spoken than a great uproar, made by horses and the voices of their riders, was heard from the courtyard.

Monsoreau shuddered.

"The duke again!" he murmured.

"Yes," said Rémy, who had gone to the window, "it is he."

The young man had not finished, when, thanks to the privilege princes have of entering unannounced, the duke entered the apartment.

Monsoreau was on the watch; he saw that the first glance of François had been for Diane.

The obtrusive gallantries of the prince enlightened him still further.

He brought to Diane one of the inimitable masterpieces that used to be made by those illustrious artists who spent a lifetime in fashioning two or three marvels, marvels that, in spite of the slowness of production, were much more common then than now.

It was a poniard with a handle of chased gold; this handle was a sort of vinaigrette; the engravings on the blade represented, with surpassing genius, a hunt, in which dogs, horses, hunters, game, trees, sky, all were mingled in such harmonious confusion that the ravished beholder found it hard to take his eyes away from this miracle of azure and gold.

"Let me look at it," said Monsoreau, who feared there might be a note concealed in the handle.

The prince relieved him of this fear by separating it into two parts.

"The blade is for you, you are a hunter," said he; "the handle is for the countess. Good day, Bussy; I see you are quite an intimate friend of the count now."

Diane blushed.

But Bussy kept his self-control.

"Monseigneur," said he, "your highness seems to forget that you ordered me this morning to inquire after M. de Monsoreau's health. I have obeyed your orders, as I always do."

"It is true," said the duke.

Then he sat down near Diane, and spoke with her in an undertone.

After a few seconds :

"Count," said he, "it is awfully hot in this sick-chamber. I see that the countess is stifling, and I am going to offer her my arm for a turn in the garden."

The husband and the lover exchanged wrathful looks.

The prince invited Diane to descend ; she rose and took his arm.

"Give me your arm," said Monsoreau to Bussy.

And Monsoreau descended behind his wife.

"Why !" exclaimed the duke, "you are quite recovered, are you not ?"

"Yes, monseigneur, and I hope to be soon able to accompany Madame de Monsoreau everywhere she goes."

"I am glad of that. But, meanwhile, take care not to over-exert yourself."

Monsoreau himself felt that the duke's warning was not to be neglected. He sat down in a spot where he could have a good view of the pair.

"By the way, count," said he to Bussy, "unless it would be trespassing on your kindness. I would ask you to escort Madame de Monsoreau to my little hôtel near the Bastille. I should feel more easy in my mind if she were there. Having torn her from the vulture's claws at Méridor, I do not want to have her devoured at Paris."

"No, no, monsieur," said Rémy to his master, "no, you cannot accept."

"And why not ?" asked Monsoreau.

"Because he belongs to M. d'Anjou, and M. d'Anjou would never forgive him for helping M. de Monsoreau to play such a trick upon him."

"What do I care ?" the impetuous young man was about to cry, when a glance from Rémy told him to keep silence.

Monsoreau was reflecting.

"Rémy is right," said he ; "I ought not to demand such a service from you. I will conduct her there myself. In a day or two the house will be ready."

"It is madness," said Bussy, "you would lose your office."

"Possibly," answered the count ; "but I shall keep my wife."

And the words were accompanied by a frown that made Bussy sigh.

However, not on the next day, but that very evening, the count went with his wife to the house at Les Tournelles with which our readers are so well acquainted.

Rémy assisted in rendering the convalescent comfortable.

Then, as he was a man of transcendent devotion, and as he saw that in such an out of the way locality Bussy would have great need of his help amid the dangers that now menaced his relations with Diane, he made advances to Gertrude, who began by beating and ended by forgiving him.

Diane took her old room in the front, overlooking the porch, the room with the bed of white and gold damask.

Nothing but a corridor separated this chamber from that of the Comte de Monsoreau.

Bussy tore his hair out in handfuls.

Saint-Luc maintained that rope-ladders had now attained the very highest degree of perfection and ought to take the place of staircases.

Monsoreau rubbed his hands and smiled, for he thought of the disappointment and rage of the Duc d'Anjou.

CHAPTER LXXX.

A VISIT TO THE HOUSE AT LES TOURNELLES.

IN some men excessive excitement is a substitute for real passion, just as hunger gives to wolves and hyenas an appearance of true courage.

It was under the influence of some such sentiment that M. d'Anjou, whose rage was indescribable when he no longer found Diane at Méridor, had returned to Paris; he was now almost in love with this woman, and for the simple reason that she had escaped him.

As a consequence, his hatred for Monsoreau, a hatred dating from the day he learned the count had betrayed him, had changed into a sort of fury, a fury the more dangerous that, having already had experience of the grand huntsman's resolute character, he determined to strike surely, and yet incur no risk himself.

On the other hand, he had not renounced his political hopes — quite the contrary; and the assurance he felt of his

own importance was now greater than ever. On his return to Paris, he resumed his dark and subterranean machinations.

The moment was favorable.

A large number of persons, belonging to that class of wavering conspirators always devoted to success, were affected by the seeming triumph the weakness of the King and the astuteness of Catharine had given to the Angevines, and eagerly rallied round the duke, uniting by imperceptible but powerful threads the cause of the prince to that of the Guises, who remained prudently in the background, observing a silence which alarmed Chicot excessively.

As for Bussy, the duke no longer confided to him any of his political plans, but was more effusive in his hypocritical demonstrations of friendship than ever. The prince was vaguely troubled by Bussy's position in Monsoreau's household, and he harbored malice against the young man on account of the confidence which the grand huntsman, so distrustful of others, seemed to feel in him.

He took fright also at the joy so apparent in Diane's face, a joy which had painted her cheeks with those rosy tints that rendered her now as desirable as she had before been adorable.

The prince knew that flowers get their color and perfume only from the sun, and women only from love. Diane was visibly happy, and to the prince, always malevolent and moody, the happiness of others was a personal offence.

Born a prince, become powerful by dark and tortuous methods, determined to make use of force to gratify his love as well as his revenge, and well served by Aurilly besides, the duke deemed it a shameful thing that he should be arrested in his desires by such ridiculous obstacles as a husband's jealousy or a wife's repugnance.

One morning, after he had slept badly and passed a night filled with hideous dreams, he felt in the humor for beginning operations and ordered his suite to accompany him on a visit to Monsoreau.

Monsoreau, as we know, had already set out for Les Tournelles.

The prince smiled at this information.

It was the afterpiece following the comedy of Méridor.

He inquired, but merely for form's sake, where the house was situated; he was told it was in the Place Saint-Antoine. Turning then to Bussy, who was in attendance on him:

"Since he has gone to Les Tournelles, let us go there too," said he.

The escort resumed its march, and the entire quarter was soon in commotion on the appearance of these twenty-four fine gentlemen, who composed the ordinary suite of the prince, and who had each two lackeys and three horses.

The prince knew the house and the door well; Bussy's knowledge of them was as accurate as that of the prince.

Both stopped in front of the door, entered the alley, and went upstairs together. The prince entered the apartments; Bussy remained on the landing.

It resulted from this arrangement that the prince, who seemed to be the privileged person, saw only Monsoreau, who was lying on a sofa, while Bussy was received by Diane and tenderly clasped in her arms, Gertrude keeping watch.

Monsoreau, naturally pale, grew livid at the sight of the prince. It was for him a terrible vision.

"Monseigneur!" he exclaimed, quivering with anger. "Monseigneur in my poor house! Really, it is too much honor for such an insignificant person as myself."

The irony was evident, for the count scarcely took the trouble to disguise it.

However, the prince paid no attention to it, and, approaching Monsoreau, smilingly:

"Wherever a suffering friend of mine goes," said he, "I go also to inquire after his health."

"I believe your highness said the word 'friend,' or I am mistaken?"

"So I did, my dear count; how are you?"

"Much better, monseigneur, I can already walk about, and in a week I shall be quite well."

"Was it your doctor that prescribed the air of the Bastille for you?" inquired the prince, apparently with the utmost frankness.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Did you not find the Rue des Petits-Pères healthful?"

"No, monseigneur, I had to receive too much company there, and they made too much noise."

The count uttered these words in a tone of firmness that did not escape the prince; and yet he did not appear to pay it the slightest attention.

"But you don't seem to have any garden here," said he.

"The garden did me harm, monseigneur," answered Monsoreau.

The prince bit his lips and fell back on his chair.

"Do you know, count," said he, after a momentary silence, "that many people are asking the King for your office of grand huntsman?"

"And under what pretext, monseigneur?"

"They claim that you are dead."

"Monseigneur, you can answer that I am not, and I am sure you will."

"Really, I don't see that I can make any answer. You bury yourself here: therefore you must be dead."

It was now Monsoreau's turn to bite his lips.

"Well, be it so, monseigneur," said he, "if I have to lose my office, I must lose it."

"You don't care, then?"

"No, there are some things I prefer to it."

"You are a singularly disinterested man, Monsoreau," said the prince.

"I am so by character, monseigneur."

"If you are so by character, you will not mind the King's knowing your character."

"Who is to tell him?"

"Why, if he question me about the matter, I must, of course, repeat our conversation."

"By my faith, monseigneur, if everything were repeated to the King that is said in Paris, he would require more than two ears to listen to all that he would hear."

"And what, pray, is said in Paris, monsieur?" said the prince, turning round toward the count as quickly as if a serpent had stung him.

Monsoreau perceived the conversation had assumed a somewhat too serious aspect for a convalescent who could not yet be said to have much freedom of action. He suppressed the wrath which was seething in the depths of his soul, and, assuming an air of indifference:

"How should such a poor paralyzed creature as I know?" said he. "Events pass by me, and I scarcely discern their shadows. If the King is angry at seeing his work done badly by me, he is wrong."

"Why so?"

"Because, undoubtedly, my accident" —

“ Well ? ”

“ Was, to a certain extent, caused by him.”

“ Explain yourself.”

“ Explain myself ! Is not M. de Saint-Luc, who wounded me, one of the dearest friends of the King ? It was the King who showed him the secret lunge by means of which he ran me through the breast, and how do I know it was not the King who quietly sent him for the purpose of doing it.”

The Duc d'Anjou made a gesture that almost meant assent.

“ You are right,” said he : “ but, after all, the King is the King.”

“ Until he is king no longer ; is not that so ? ” said Monsoreau.

The duke started.

“ By the way,” said he, “ is not Madame de Monsoreau staying with you ? ”

“ Monseigneur, she is ill at present ; but for that, she would have already presented her very humble respects to your highness.”

“ Ill ? Poor woman ! ”

“ Yes, monseigneur.”

“ From grief at seeing your sufferings ? ”

“ Yes, at first ; then from the fatigue of moving.”

“ Let us hope her indisposition will be of short duration, my dear count. You have such a skilful physician.”

And he rose from his seat.

“ You are right, monseigneur,” said Monsoreau. “ My dear friend Rémy has treated me admirably.”

“ Why, that is the name of Bussy's doctor ! ”

“ Yes, monseigneur ; the count, in fact, gave him to me.”

“ Then you and Bussy have become friends ? ”

“ He is my best, I ought rather to say, my only friend,” replied Monsoreau, coldly.

“ Adieu, count,” said the prince, raising the damask hangings.

At the same instant, just as he was passing his head under the tapestry, he fancied he saw something like the skirt of a gown disappear in the next room, while, at the same time, Bussy rapidly made his way to his post in the middle of the corridor.

The suspicions of the duke grew stronger.

“ We are starting,” said he to Bussy.

Bussy did not answer, but ran down at once to give the escort orders to get ready, and, perhaps, also to hide from the prince the redness of his face.

The duke, now alone on the landing, tried to enter the corridor through which he had seen the silken dress disappear.

But, on turning, he observed that Monsoreau had followed him and was standing on the threshold, pale and leaning against the door-post.

"Your highness has mistaken your way," said he, coldly.

"You are right," stammered the duke. "Thanks."

And he went downstairs, with rage in his heart.

During their return — and the way was long — Bussy and he did not exchange a single word.

Bussy left the duke at the door of his hôtel.

As soon as the duke had entered his cabinet, and was alone, Aurilly glided into it also, with an air of great mystery.

"Well," said the duke, when he perceived him, "I have been actually jeered at by the husband!"

"And, perhaps, also by the lover, monseigneur," said the musician.

"What 's that you say?"

"The truth, your highness."

"Tell me all, then."

"Listen, monseigneur, I hope your highness will forgive me, as what I did was done for your service."

"Go on, I forgive you in advance."

"Well, then, after you had gone upstairs, I watched under a shed in the yard."

"Ah! and you saw" —

"A woman's dress; I saw this woman lean forward; I saw two arms twined round her neck; and, as my ear is well-trained, I heard the sound of a long and tender kiss."

"But who was the man?" asked the duke. "Did you recognize him?"

"I cannot recognize a man by his arms, monseigneur," said Aurilly; "gloves have no features."

"Yes, but you might recognize the gloves."

"Well, not exactly recognized," said Aurilly; "it seemed to me, however" —

"That you recognized them, did you not? Go on."

"But it is only a guess."

"No matter; continue."

"Well, then, monseigneur, they looked like M. de Bussy's gloves."

"Buff gloves, embroidered in gold, were they not?" cried the duke, from whose eyes suddenly vanished the cloud which, until now, had veiled the truth.

"Yes, buff gloves, embroidered in gold, monseigneur," repeated Aurilly.

"Ah! Bussy! yes. Bussy! it is Bussy," cried the duke. "Oh, I was blind, or rather, no, I was not blind, only I could not believe in such audacity."

"Take care," said Aurilly; "it seems to me your highness is speaking rather loud."

"Bussy!" repeated the duke once more, recalling a thousand circumstances that had passed unnoticed before, but which now assumed more and more significance as he recalled them.

"Still your highness ought not to believe too lightly; might there not have been a man concealed in Madame de Monsoreau's room?"

"Yes, doubtless; but Bussy, Bussy, who was in that corridor, would have seen him."

"It is true, monseigneur."

"And then, the gloves, the gloves."

"True also. And, besides, the sound of the kiss, I heard also"—

"What?"

"Three words."

"What were they?"

"These: 'Till to-morrow evening.'"

"Great heavens!"

"So that if we were to set out on an expedition like the one we were once engaged in, we could make sure."

"Aurilly, to-morrow evening we'll act as you suggest."

"Your highness knows I am at your orders."

"I know it. Ah, Bussy! Bussy!" he continued to repeat between his teeth; "Bussy, traitor to your lord! Bussy, the terror of every one! Bussy, the honest man! Bussy, who would not have me king of France!"

And the duke, smiling with an infernal joy, dismissed Aurilly, that he might reflect at his ease.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE WATCHERS.

AURILLY and the Duc d'Anjou kept their word to each other: the duke retained Bussy at his side as much as he was able during the day, so as not to lose sight of any of his movements.

Bussy asked for nothing better than to wait on the prince during the day; for, by doing so, he had his evening free.

His method of spending the evening, after being released, had become in him almost automatic.

At ten o'clock he wrapped himself in his cloak, and, with his rope-ladder under his arm, made his way in the direction of the Bastile.

The duke, who did not know that Bussy had a ladder in his antechamber, and could not believe that any one would walk alone in that way through the streets of Paris; the duke, who was sure that Bussy would call at his hôtel for a horse and a servant, lost ten minutes in preparations. During these ten minutes, Bussy, brisk and amorous, had already gone three-fourths of the distance.

Bussy was lucky, as bold people generally are; he met with no unpleasant accident on his way, and, as he drew near the house, he saw a light in one of the windows.

It was the signal agreed on between him and Diane.

Bussy's ladder was furnished with six hooks placed inversely, so that when thrown it was sure to fasten itself somewhere.

At the noise, Diane extinguished the light and opened the window to steady the ladder.

The thing was done in a moment.

Diane looked over the square, examining every nook and corner.

The square was apparently deserted.

Then she made a sign to Bussy to mount.

Bussy climbed the rungs two by two; there were ten; he got over them in five seconds.

The moment was happily chosen, for while Bussy was getting in at the window, M. de Monsoreau, who had been listening patiently at his wife's door for over ten minutes, was painfully descending the stairs, supported by the arm of a confidential

valet, who replaced Rémy, greatly to his master's advantage, every time dressings and salves were not in question.

This double manœuvre, which could have been planned by none but a skilful strategist, was executed with such promptitude that Monsoreau was opening the street door just at the very moment when Bussy had drawn up the ladder and Diane had closed the window.

Monsoreau went as far as the street; but, as we have said, the street was deserted, and he saw nothing.

"You must have been incorrectly informed," said Monsoreau to his domestic.

"No, monseigneur," replied the latter; "when I was leaving the Hôtel d'Anjou I was told in the most positive terms by the head groom, who is one of my friends, that his highness had ordered two horses for to-night. But perhaps, monseigneur, it was for the purpose of going somewhere else."

"Why, where else could he be going to?" said Monsoreau, gloomily.

The count was like all jealous people, who imagine the rest of the world have nothing to think of except to torment them.

He looked round a second time.

"Perhaps it would have been better if I had stayed in Diane's chamber," he murmured; "but, likely enough, they have signals for corresponding. She would have warned him of my presence, and I should have known nothing. Better to watch outside, as was arranged between us. Well, lead me to the hiding-place from which you say we can see everything."

"Come, monseigneur," said the valet.

Monsoreau advanced, leaning on the arm of his valet and supporting himself also by pressing his hand against the wall.

About twenty or twenty-five steps from the door, and near the Bastille, was an enormous heap of stones which had come from the ruins of demolished houses and were used as fortifications by the children of the quarter in those mimic battles that were probably relics of the days of Armagnacs and Burgundians.

In the middle of this heap of stones the valet had constructed a sort of sentry-box which could easily hold and hide two persons.

He spread a cloak over the stones, upon which Monsoreau crouched.

The valet knelt at the feet of the count.

A loaded musketoon was placed near them, to be used in case of emergency.

The valet was getting the match of the weapon ready. Monsoreau stopped him.

"Wait," said he, "there will be plenty of time. The game we are scenting is royal. The punishment for him who touches it is the rope."

And his eyes, inflamed as those of a wolf lurking in the neighborhood of a sheepfold, were fixed on Diane's window or pierced the depths of the faubourg and of the adjacent faubourgs, for he desired to surprise, and was afraid of being surprised.

Diane had prudently drawn her thick tapestry curtains so that scarcely a ray of light filtered through to show there was any life in this house that was plunged in such absolute darkness.

Monsoreau had hardly lain hidden ten minutes when two horses appeared at the opening of the Rue Saint-Antoine.

The valet did not speak, but pointed his hand in the direction of the horses.

"Yes," said Monsoreau, "I see."

The two cavaliers alighted at the corner of the Hôtel des Tournelles and fastened their horses to the iron rings placed in the wall for this purpose.

"Monseigneur," said Aurilly, "I believe we have come too late; he must have gone directly from your hôtel; he had an advantage of ten minutes over you and has entered."

"Granted," answered the prince; "but, though we may not see him go in, we're sure to see him come out."

"Yes, but when?" said Aurilly.

"Whenever we wish," said the prince.

"Would it be showing too much curiosity to ask you how you intend to manage the matter, monseigneur?"

"In the easiest way in the world. One of us — I'll let you do it — has but to knock at the door and inquire how M. de Monsoreau is getting along. Any sound frightens a lover. Then as you are getting in through the door, he'll be getting out through the window, and, as I'll remain outside, I'm pretty sure to see him when he is taking to his heels."

"And Monsoreau?"

"What the devil can he have to object? He is my friend; I am so uneasy about him that I came to make inquiries, for I

thought he looked very ill when I saw him to-day ; nothing more simple."

" Nothing could be more ingenious, monseigneur," said Aurilly.

" Do you hear what they are saying ? " asked Monsoreau of his valet.

" No, monseigneur ; but, if they continue speaking, we cannot fail to hear them, for they are coming in this direction."

" Monseigneur," said Aurilly, " I see a heap of stones which seems expressly designed as a hiding-place for your highness."

" Yes, but wait ; perhaps we may be able to see something through the curtains."

In fact, Diane had relit her lamp, and, as we mentioned before, a scarcely perceptible ray of light reached the outside. The duke and Aurilly turned this way and that in search of a spot from whence they could see into the interior of the apartment.

During these different evolutions, Monsoreau was fairly boiling with rage, and often laid a hand on the barrel of his musket, which was less cold than that hand.

" Oh ! shall I endure this ? " he murmured ; " shall I swallow this insult also ? No, no ; so much the worse, but my patience is exhausted.

" God's death ! am I not to be allowed to either sleep or keep awake or even suffer in tranquillity, because a shameful fancy has lodged in the idle brain of this dastard prince ! No, I am not a complaisant lackey, I am the Comte de Monsoreau, and let him but come this way, and I swear by my sacred honor I will blow his brains out. Light the match, René, light the " —

At this very moment, just as the prince, finding that it was impossible to see into the chamber, had made up his mind to hide among the stones while Aurilly was knocking at the door, suddenly the latter, forgetful of the distance between him and the prince, laid his hand quickly on the arm of François.

" Eh ! monsieur," said the astounded prince, " what is the matter ? "

" Come away, monseigneur, come away," said Aurilly.

" But why ? "

" Do you not see a gleam of light on your left ? Come away, monseigneur, come."

" Yes, I see a spark among the stones."

"It is the match of a musket or arquebuse, monseigneur."

"Ah!" exclaimed the prince, "and who the devil can be lying in ambush there?"

"Some friend or servant of Bussy. Let us go away at once: we can round a corner and return from another direction. The servant is now sure to give the alarm and we'll then see Bussy come out of the window."

"Upon my word, you're right," said the prince, "come."

Both crossed the street and went to the place where their horses were tied.

"They are going away," said the valet.

"Yes," answered Monsoreau. "Did you recognize them?"

"In my opinion, at least, they were the Duc d'Anjou and Aurilly."

"Right. But I'll be absolutely certain in a moment."

"What are you about to do, monseigneur?"

"Come!"

Meanwhile, the duke and Aurilly were passing the Rue Sainte-Catherine, intending to skirt the gardens and return by the Boulevard de la Bastille.

Monsoreau went home and ordered his litter to be got ready.

What the duke had foretold happened.

Bussy was alarmed by the noise made by Monsoreau: the light was again extinguished, the window again opened, the ladder again fastened, and Bussy, to his great regret, had to fly like Romeo, but without having, like Romeo, seen the sun rise and heard the lark sing.

Just at the moment when his feet touched the ground and Diane threw him the ladder, the duke and Aurilly reached the corner of the Bastille.

They saw distinctly a shadow, suspended between earth and sky, beneath the window of the fair Diane. But this shadow vanished almost immediately at the corner of the Rue Saint-Paul.

"Monseigneur," said the valet, "we shall wake up the entire house."

"What is that to me?" answered Monsoreau; "I am master in my own house, I presume, and have, at least, the right to do what the Duc d'Anjou wished to do."

The litter was now ready. Monsoreau sent for two of his servants, who were lodging in the Rue des Tournelles and had

been his principal attendants ever since the day upon which he had been wounded. When they had arrived and taken their places, one at each portière, the machine, drawn by two robust horses, started at a brisk trot and, in less than a quarter of an hour, was in front of the gate of the Hôtel d'Anjou.

The duke and Aurilly had so recently returned that their horses were not yet unsaddled.

Monsoreau, who was one of those privileged to visit the prince at any time, appeared on the threshold, just as the duke, after throwing his hat on a chair, was stretching out his boots to a valet to pull off.

Another valet announced the grand huntsman, preceding him by only a few steps.

A thunderbolt shattering the windows in the prince's apartment could not have astonished him more than the words just heard.

"M. de Monsoreau!" he cried, with an anxiety that could be easily discerned in his pallor and in the trembling of his voice.

"Yes, monseigneur, myself," said the count, restraining, or, rather, trying to restrain, the violent emotion that shook him.

He made such desperate efforts to control his feelings that his legs gave way under him, and he fell on a chair that stood near the entrance to the chamber.

"Why, my dear friend," said the duke, "you will kill yourself. You are so pale that you seem on the point of fainting."

"Oh, I shall not faint, monseigneur. The matters I have to confide to your highness are too important to allow me to do so — at least now. Perhaps I shall faint afterward."

"Well, speak, my dear count," said François, quite overcome.

"But not before your people, I presume," said Monsoreau.

The duke dismissed every one, even Aurilly.

The two men were alone.

"Your highness has just returned?"

"As you see, count."

"It is very imprudent of your highness to frequent the streets in this fashion during the night."

"Who told you I had been in the streets?"

"Why, the dust that covers your clothes, monseigneur."

"M. de Monsoreau," said the prince, in a tone there could be no mistaking, "do you really hold a second office, besides that of grand huntsman?"

"That of spy? Yes, monseigneur. Every one follows that calling now, more or less, and I like the rest."

"And what does your profession bring you, monsieur?"

"The knowledge of what is passing."

"A curious trade," remarked the prince, edging nearer to the bell, so that he might have it within his reach, if he found it necessary to ring.

"A curious trade, indeed," said Monsoreau.

"Well, tell me what you have to say."

"That is the purpose for which I came."

"Will you permit me to be seated?"

"No irony, monseigneur, toward a true and faithful friend like me — a friend who comes at this hour and in this condition because he wants to render you a signal service. If I have ventured to take a seat, it was because, upon my honor, I was unable to stand."

"A service," inquired the duke, "a service?"

"Yes."

"Speak, then."

"Monseigneur, I came to your highness on behalf of a mighty prince."

"On the part of the King?"

"No, on the part of Monseigneur le Duc de Guise."

"Ah!" said the prince; "on the part of the Duc de Guise; that is another matter. Approach, and speak low."

CHAPTER LXXXII.

HOW THE DUC D'ANJOU SIGNED, AND HOW, AFTER SIGNING,
HE SPOKE.

THE Duc d'Anjou and Monsoreau were silent for a moment. The duke was the first to break this silence.

"Well, then, M. le Comte," he asked, "what have you to say to me on the part of the Guises?"

"Much, monseigneur."

"They have written to you, then?"

"Oh, no; they never write, never since the strange disappearance of Maître Nicolas David."

"Then you must have gone to the army."

"No, monseigneur; but they have come to Paris."

"The Guises in Paris?" cried the duke.

"Yes, monseigneur."

"And I have not seen them!"

"They are too prudent to expose either themselves or your highness to any danger."

"And no one gave me notice of their arrival!"

"Oh, yes, monseigneur, I have done so."

"But what is their purpose in coming?"

"Purpose, monseigneur? Why, to keep the appointment you made with them."

"I! I made an appointment with them?"

"Undoubtedly; on the very day your highness was arrested you received a letter from M. de Guise, and replied to it verbally, through me, that they were to come to Paris between the thirty-first of May and the second of June. It is now the thirty-first of May, and, as you see, if you have forgotten them, they have not forgotten you, monseigneur."

François turned pale.

So many events had occurred since then that he had forgotten the appointment, notwithstanding its importance.

"True," said he; "but the relations existing between the Guises and me at that time exist no longer."

"If that be the case, monseigneur," answered the count, "you would do well to inform them of the fact, for I believe they are of quite a different opinion."

"How so?"

"You may think you are under no responsibility to them; but they are sure they labor under a great responsibility to you."

"A trap, my dear count, a snare in which such a man as I am does not allow himself to be caught twice."

"And where, monseigneur, were you caught once?"

"Where? Where was I caught? In the Louvre, *mordieu!*"

"Was that the fault of the Guises?"

"I do not say it was," murmured the duke; "I do not say it was; but I do say that they did nothing to help me to escape."

"That would have been difficult, since they were flying themselves."

"That is true," muttered the duke.

"But, once you were in Anjou, did they not commission me to inform you that you might always rely on them as they

relied on you, and that on the day you marched on Paris, they would march by your side."

"True again," said the duke; "but I have not marched on Paris."

"Of course not, for you are in Paris."

"Yes; but I am in Paris as my brother's ally."

"Monseigneur will permit me to observe that he is more the ally of the Guises than of his brother."

"How can that be so?"

"Monseigneur is their accomplice."

The Duc d'Anjou bit his lips.

"And you say they commissioned you to announce their arrival to me?"

"Yes, your highness, they did me that honor."

"And have they told you why they returned?"

"They have told me everything, monseigneur, — all their purposes and plans, — because they knew I was your highness's confidential agent."

"So they have plans? What are they?"

"The same, always."

"And they think them practicable?"

"They think their success assured."

"And the object of these plans is still" —

The duke paused; he did not dare to pronounce the words that should naturally follow those already uttered.

Monsoreau completed the idea in the duke's mind.

"To make you king of France; yes, monseigneur."

The duke felt his cheeks grow red from the joy that thrilled him.

"But," he inquired, "is the moment favorable?"

"Your wisdom must decide."

"My wisdom?"

"Yes; I shall place before you certain facts, obvious and unanswerable facts."

"Let us hear them."

"The nomination of the King as head of the League was only a farce, speedily recognized as such, and condemned as soon as it was recognized. Now there is a reaction, and the entire state is ready to rise against the tyranny of the King and of his creatures. Every sermon is a call to arms, every church a place where people curse the King instead of praying to God. The army is boiling over with impatience, the

citizens are forming associations, our agents are constantly gaining fresh signatures and adhesions to the League; in short, the reign of Valois is approaching its end. In such a crisis, the Guises need to have at hand a serious claimant to the crown, and their choice has naturally fallen upon you. Are you ready now to surrender your former aspirations?"

The duke did not answer.

"Well?" asked Monsoreau, "what is your highness thinking of doing?"

"Faith," answered the prince, "I am thinking" —

"You know, monseigneur, that you may speak to me with the utmost frankness."

"I am thinking that my brother has no children, that I am his successor, and that his health is precarious; why, therefore, should I help these people to stir up revolts, why should I compromise my name, my dignity, my family affection, by a useless rivalry; why, in a word, should I attempt to seize, at my peril, a throne that must be mine without any danger?"

"That is just where the error of your highness lies," said Monsoreau; "you can have your brother's throne, but only by seizing it. MM. de Guise cannot be kings themselves; but they will have no king except one of their own making; the king they had reckoned on as a substitute for the reigning sovereign was your highness: but, should you refuse to be that king, I warn you they will seek another."

"And who, pray," cried the Duc d'Anjou, with a frown, "would dare to seat himself on the throne of Charlemagne?"

"A Bourbon instead of a Valois; a son of Saint Louis instead of a son of Saint Louis; the matter is quite simple, monseigneur."

"The King of Navarre?" exclaimed François.

"Why not? he is young and brave. He has no children, it is true; but he surely may have them."

"He is a Huguenot."

"He! Was he not converted the night of Saint Bartholomew?"

"Yes, but he has since abjured."

"Ah! monseigneur, what he did for his life he will do for a throne."

"So they believe, do they, that I will surrender my rights without a struggle?"

"I think that contingency is provided for."

"I will make a strong fight against them."

"What of that? they are men of war."

"I will put myself at the head of the League."

"They are its soul."

"I will unite with my brother."

"Your brother will be dead."

"I will summon the kings of Europe to my help."

"The kings of Europe will be ready enough to make war on kings; they will think twice before making war on a people."

"How, on a people?"

"Undoubtedly; the Guises have planned out everything, are ready even to form France into states, are ready even for a republic."

François wrung his hands in anguish. Monsoreau was terrible with these unanswerable answers of his.

"A republic?" he murmured.

"Yes; like Switzerland, Genoa, Venice."

"But my party will not allow France to be turned into a republic."

"Your party?" inquired Monsoreau. "Why, monseigneur, owing to your disinterestedness and magnanimity, I believe, upon my soul, that your party now consists solely of M. de Bussy and myself."

The duke could not repress a sinister smile.

"I am bound to the Guises, then?" said he.

"Well, somewhat, monseigneur."

"But, if I am so powerless as you say, what can they want with me?"

"Because, monseigneur, while you can do nothing without the Guises, you can do everything with them."

"I can do everything with them?"

"Yes, say but the word and you are king."

The duke rose, in great agitation; he walked about the room, and as he walked, fingered everything in his way: curtains, hangings, table-covers; at length he paused in front of Monsoreau.

"You told the truth, count," said he, "when you declared I had only two friends now: you and Bussy."

He uttered these words with a benevolent smile; his progress round the room had given him time to substitute it for the look of pale fury that was on his face before.

"So, then?" asked Monsoreau, a gleam of joy in his eyes.

"So, then, my faithful servant," returned the duke, "speak; I am all attention."

"You bid me speak, monseigneur?"

"Yes."

"Well! in two words, this is the plan, monseigneur."

The duke turned pale again, but he paused to listen.

The count resumed:

"In a week we shall have the festival of Corpus Christi, monseigneur, shall we not?"

"Yes."

"The King has been long organizing a great procession to all the chief convents in Paris on that holyday, has he not?"

"It is his custom to have such processions every year at that period."

"Then, as your highness will remember, the King is without guards, or, at least, his guards remain outside the door. He halts before each *reposoir*,¹ kneels, says five *Paters* and five *Aves*, and, afterward, the Seven Penitential Psalms."

"I know all that."

"He will go to the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève, as well as to the others."

"Perfectly correct."

"Only, as an accident will occur in front of the convent" —

"An accident?"

"Yes, a sewer will have fallen in during the night."

"Well?"

"Consequently the *reposoir* cannot be left under the porch; it will have to be removed to the courtyard."

"Go on."

"Pay close attention: the King, with four or five others, will enter; but, when they are inside, the gates will be closed."

"And then?"

"Well, then, — your highness is acquainted with the monks who will do the honors of the abbey to his Majesty?"

"They will be the same" —

"Who were present when your highness was crowned?"

"They will dare to lay their hands on the Lord's anointed?"

"Yes, but only to tensure him; you know the quatrain" —

" 'You flung off the first crown you have worn,
Sneaked away, left your people to ruin.
The crown you wear now shall be torn
From your head. Shears will give you a new one.' "

¹ Temporary altar erected for religious processions.

"They will dare to do that!" he cried, his eyes shining with avidity, "dare to touch the head of a king!"

"Oh, he will not be king then."

"Why not?"

"Did you never hear of a Genevievean monk who fills up the time before he is to perform miracles with preaching sermons?"

"Brother Gorenflot?"

"The same."

"The fellow who wanted to preach the League, with his arquebuse on his shoulder?"

"The same. Well, the King will be conducted to his cell; once there, the brother undertakes to force him to sign his abdication; then, after the abdication, Madame de Montpensier will enter with a pair of shears or scissors in her hand. They have been purchased already, and she wears them now at her side. They are very beautiful, made of massive gold and admirably chased; nothing can be too good for a king."

François did not utter a word; his shifty eyes were dilated like those of a cat lying in wait for her prey in the dark.

"You understand the rest, monseigneur," continued the count.

"A proclamation will be issued to the people, announcing that the King, moved by a holy desire to repent of his sins, intends to remain in the convent. Should any one doubt the reality of the King's vocation, well, M. de Guise controls the army; M. de Mayenne, the citizens; and M. le Cardinal, the church; with these three forces under your hand, you may make the people believe almost anything."

"But they will accuse me of violence," said the duke, after a pause.

"You need not be there at all."

"They will regard me as a usurper."

"Monseigneur forgets the abdication."

"The King will refuse."

"It seems Brother Gorenflot is a man of great strength as well as a man of great intellect."

"They have decided, then, on the plan?"

"Yes."

"And they are not afraid that I may reveal it?"

"No, monseigneur, for, in case you betray them, they have a plan quite as easy of execution, but it would be directed against you."

"Ah!" exclaimed François.

"Yes, monseigneur. I am not acquainted with it, as they know I am too much your friend to trust me in such a case. All I know is that it exists."

"Then I surrender, count; what am I to do?"

"Approve."

"Well, I approve."

"Yes: but it is not enough to approve by word of mouth."

"And what other kind of approval is required?"

"By writing."

"They must be mad to think I would consent to such a thing."

"And why?"

"Suppose the conspiracy fail?"

"It is in view of such a possible failure that they ask for your signature, monseigneur."

"They wish to make my name a sort of bulwark for themselves, do they?"

"Nothing else."

"Then I refuse a thousand times."

"You cannot do so now."

"I cannot do so now?"

"No."

"Are you mad?"

"To refuse now would be to betray."

"How?"

"Because I asked nothing better than to be silent, and, if I spoke, it was in obedience to the orders of your highness."

"Well, be it so; let these gentlemen take it as they like; at least, as I have a choice of dangers, I'll choose whatever danger I wish."

"Monseigneur, beware of choosing badly."

"I will risk it," said François, somewhat disturbed, but making an effort to keep cool.

"For your own interest, I advise you not to do so."

"But if I sign, I compromise myself."

"If you refuse to sign, you do worse: you become a party to your own murder."

François shuddered.

"Would they dare?" said he.

"They will dare everything. The conspirators have advanced too far; they must succeed at any price."



HE TOOK, OR RATHER, TORE, THE PEN FROM THE COUNT'S HAND
AND SIGNED.

The duke fell into a state of indecision easy to understand.

"I will sign," said he.

"When?"

"To-morrow."

"To-morrow? No, monseigneur; if you sign, you must sign immediately."

"But MM. de Guise have to draw up the agreement I am to sign in connection with them."

"It is drawn up already, monseigneur; I have it with me."

Monsoreau drew a paper from his pocket: it was a full and entire adhesion to the scheme with which we are already acquainted.

The duke read it from end to end, and the count could see that, as he read, he turned pale; when he had finished, his legs failed him, and he sat, or rather fell, down on the chair before the table.

"Take this, monseigneur," said Monsoreau, handing him a pen.

"Must I sign, then?" said François, pressing his hand to his forehead, for he felt as if his head was turning.

"You must if you wish; no one forces you."

"But if no one force me, there are some who threaten me with assassination."

"I do not threaten you, monseigneur, God forbid; I warn you. That is quite a different thing."

"Give it," said the duke.

And, as if making an effort over himself, he took, or rather, tore, the pen from the count's hand and signed.

Monsoreau watched him with an eye burning with hate and hope; when he saw him put pen to paper, he had to lean on the table; his eyes seemed to dilate as the duke formed the letters that composed his name.

"Ah!" cried he, when the duke had finished.

And seizing the paper with a movement as violent as that with which the duke had seized the pen, he folded it, hid it between his shirt and the silken habiliment that did duty for a waistcoat at the time, buttoned his doublet, and wrapped his cloak over it.

The duke stared at him in amazement; he could read nothing on that face, across which a gleam of ferocious joy had just flashed.

"And now, monseigneur," said Monsoreau, "be prudent."

“In what way?”

“Give up running about the streets with Aurilly, as you have been doing awhile ago.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, monseigneur, that to-night you persecuted with your love a woman whom her husband adores, a woman of whom he is so jealous that, by my faith, he is determined to kill any one who approaches her without his permission.”

“May I ask is it of yourself and your wife that you are really speaking?”

“Yes, monseigneur, since you have guessed so correctly at the first trial I will not deny it. I have married Diane de Méridor; she is mine, and no one shall have her, at least, as long as I am living, not even a prince!”

He almost touched with his poniard the breast of the prince, who started back.

“Monsieur, you threaten me,” said François, pale with fury.

“No, my prince, I only warn you, as I did a moment ago.”

“Warn me of what?”

“That no one shall have my wife.”

“And I, you double-dyed fool,” cried the Due d’Anjou, beside himself with rage, “tell you your warning comes too late, for some one has had her already.”

Monsoreau uttered a terrible cry and buried his hands in his hair.

“It was not you,” he stammered, “it was not you, monseigneur?”

And he held his poniard in such a way that with a single thrust he could stab the prince to the heart.

François recoiled.

“You are mad, count,” preparing to strike the bell.

“No, I see clearly, speak sensibly, and understand correctly. You have just said that some one has possessed my wife; you said so.”

“I repeat it.”

“Name this person, and prove the fact.”

“Who was hidden to-night, about twenty yards from your house, with a musket?”

“I.”

“Well, count, during that time” —

“During that time” —

“A man was in your house, or rather, in your wife’s room.”

"You saw him enter?"

"No, I saw him come out."

"By the door?"

"By the window."

"You recognized the man?"

"Yes."

"Name him," cried Monsoreau, "name him, monseigneur, or I cannot answer for myself."

The duke passed his hand over his forehead and something like a smile flitted across his lips.

"M. le Comte," said he, "on my honor as a prince of the blood, on my soul and before God, within a week I will make you acquainted with the man who possesses your wife."

"You swear it?" cried Monsoreau.

"I swear it."

"Well, monseigneur, in a week," said Monsoreau, striking the part of his breast upon which lay the paper, "in a week, or, — you understand?"

"Return in a week; that is all I have to say to you."

"After all, that is better," said Monsoreau. "In a week I shall be well, and he who is eager for vengeance needs all his strength."

He passed out, making a gesture that was more threatening than valedictory.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

A PROMENADE AT LES TOURNELLES.

MEANWHILE the Angevine gentlemen had gradually returned to Paris.

It cannot be said, however, that they returned with confidence. They knew the King and the King's brother and mother too well to hope that everything would end in a family embrace.

They never forgot how they had been chased by the King's friends, and had not the slightest expectation that a triumphal entry would be allotted to them as a sort of reparation for that rather disagreeable incident.

And so their return was marked by a certain degree of timidity; they stole into the city, armed to the teeth, were

ready to fire on the slightest provocation, and before arriving at the Hôtel d'Anjou drew their swords at least fifty times on innocent tradesmen whose sole crime was that of looking at them as they passed by.

Antragnet, especially, was the most ferocious of them all, and laid all the imaginary insults they received to the account of the King's minions, comforting himself with the thought that whenever the opportunity arose he should have a few very significant words to say to them.

He imparted his purpose to Ribeirac, a man of proved sagacity, who replied that whenever he indulged in such a pleasure he should take care to have a frontier or two at hand.

"I'll try to do so," answered Antragnet.

The duke gave them a cordial welcome.

They were his men, just as MM. de Mangiron, Schomberg, Quélus, and D'Épernon were the King's.

He began by saying :

"My friends, there are people here who are just a little bit in the humor for killing you. I know the wind sets in that quarter. Look out for yourselves."

"We have done so, monseigneur," answered Antragnet; "but ought we not to offer our very humble respects to his Majesty? For to hide ourselves would really do no great honor to Anjou. How does it strike your highness?"

"You are right," said the duke, "go, and, if you like, I will go along with you."

The three young men looked inquiringly at one another. At this moment Bussy entered the hall and embraced his friends.

"Why," said he, "you have been awfully late! But what is this I hear? Monseigneur proposing to go and get himself killed in the Louvre like Cæsar in the Roman senate! Only think of what the pleasure of the minions would be if they could each carry away a little bit of his highness under their cloaks!"

"But, my dear friend," said Antragnet, "the very thing we want is just to have a little fling at these fellows."

Bussy did not think the time had come to tell them of the proposed duel.

"Oh," said he, "as to that, we'll see, we'll see."

The duke observed him very attentively.

"Let us go to the Louvre," said Bussy, "but by ourselves."

Moussaigneur will stay in his garden and amuse himself by knocking off the heads of the poppies."

François pretended to laugh in merry protest, but the fact was he was pleased to be relieved of an irksome task.

The Angevines were arrayed in great splendor.

They were high and mighty lords who joyously squandered the revenues derived from the paternal acres in silks, velvets, and laces.

The whole four of them, when together, presented a dazzling spectacle of gold, precious stones, and magnificent brocades. They were cheered on the way by the people, who, with their usual infallible instinct, detected under these fine costumes hearts on fire with hatred for the minions.

Henri III. refused to receive these gentlemen from Anjou, and they waited vainly in the gallery.

It was Maugiron, Quélus, Schomberg, and D'Épernon who brought them the tidings of the King's refusal, which they did with the most courteous salutations and with expressions of the most profound regret.

"Ah, messires," said Antraguët, "this is sad news indeed! but coming from your lips it loses half its bitterness."

"Gentlemen," said Schomberg, "you are the very pink of grace and courtesy. Would it be agreeable to you to make up for the reception which you have missed by enjoying a little promenade?"

"Oh! gentlemen, we were just on the point of requesting that favor," was the quick answer of Antraguët, though Bussy touched his arm lightly, saying:

"Silence, if you please, and let them alone."

"I wonder where we should go," said Quélus, as if in doubt.

"I know a charming spot near the Bastile," replied Schomberg.

"Gentlemen, we follow you," said Ribeirac; "pray take the lead."

And the King's four friends passed out of the Louvre, followed by the four Angevines, and marched along the quays to the old paddock of Les Tournelles, then the Marché-aux-Chevaux; it formed a sort of square, perfectly level, with a few poor-looking trees scattered here and there, and fences which served to keep the horses inside and to which they were also tied.

The young gentlemen walked arm in arm, lavishing on one

another every sort of civility and conversing in the most gay and sprightly fashion, to the stupefaction of the good citizens, who began to regret their late hurrahs and to say that the Angevines had made a covenant with the swine of Herodes!

On arriving, Quélus said :

“ You could n't find a nicer or a lonelier spot for the purpose, and what a capital footing the ground gives ! ”

• “ Faith, you're right,” answered Antraguët, stamping the earth several times.

“ Well,” continued Quélus, “ these gentlemen and I have been thinking, knowing your politeness, that you would accompany us hither, one of these days, and second, tierce, and quarte M. de Bussy, your friend, who has done us the honor of challenging us all four.”

“ It is true,” said Bussy to his astounded companions.

“ And he never said a word about it ! ” cried Antraguët.

“ Oh, M. de Bussy is a gentleman who knows the value of words,” retorted Quélus. “ Would you deign to accept, gentlemen of Anjou ? ”

“ Accept ? Why, of course,” cried the three Angevines together. “ We are delighted at so great an honor.”

“ Nothing could be better,” said Schomberg, rubbing his hands. “ And now if it be agreeable to you, let each select his adversary.”

“ I am perfectly willing,” answered Ribeirac, with flaming eyes ; “ and, after that ” —

“ No,” interrupted Bussy, “ that would not be fair. We are all actuated by the same feelings ; therefore we are inspired by God. God, I assure you, gentlemen, is the author of human ideas. Then leave to God the task of settling the matter. And, besides, should we agree that the first who kills or mortally wounds his antagonist shall be at liberty to attack the others ” —

“ Yes ! yes ! ” cried the minions, “ that is what we wish ” —

“ The more reason, then, that we should act like the Horatii, and draw lots.”

“ Are you sure the Horatii drew lots ? ” asked Quélus, thoughtfully.

“ I have every reason to believe so,” replied Bussy.

“ Then let us imitate them.”

“ A moment,” said Bussy. “ Before knowing who are to be our antagonists, let us agree on the rules of combat. It

would be highly indecorous to make these rules only after the selection of opponents."

"Oh, the matter is simple enough," said Schomberg, "we will fight until death ensues."

"Doubtless; but how are we to fight?" asked Quélus.

"With sword and dagger," answered Bussy; "we all have had good practice at both."

"On foot?" said Quélus.

"Yes, our movements will be freer; why should we bother about horses?"

"On foot, then."

"On what day?"

"Why, as soon as possible."

"No," said D'Épernon, "I have a thousand matters to settle, and a will to make. Excuse me, but I prefer a little delay — A delay of three or four or six days will sharpen our appetites for the affair."

"Spoken like a hero," said Bussy, somewhat ironically.

"Do you agree?"

"Yes," said Livarot; "we're getting along beautifully."

"Let us draw lots, then," said Bussy.

"Just a word," said Anraguet; "I propose this: let us divide the ground fairly. As the names will be drawn two by two, let us chalk out four compartments, one for each pair."

"Well said."

"I propose for number one the long square between the two lime-trees yonder; it's a lovely spot."

"Agreed."

"But the sun?"

"Yes," said another, "the second would be turned to the east."

"No, no, gentlemen," said Bussy; "such an arrangement would be unfair. We may kill, but we must not assassinate one another. Let us draw a semicircle; in this way the sun will strike us all obliquely."

Bussy showed how they were to stand if his proposal were accepted; then the names were drawn.

The first that came out was that of Schomberg; the second that of Ribeirac. They were to be the first pair.

Quélus and Anraguet were the second.

Livarot and Maugiron were the third.

When Bussy heard the name of Quélus, whom he had hoped to have for an adversary, he frowned.

When D'Épernon heard his name coupled with Bussy's, he turned pale and had to pull his mustache very hard to call up some color in his cheeks.

"Now, gentlemen," said Bussy, "until the day of the combat we belong to one another. We are friends, be it for life or death. Will you do me the honor of dining with me at the Hôtel de Bussy?"

All bowed in token of assent and proceeded to the residence of Bussy, where a sumptuous banquet kept them together until daybreak.

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

IN WHICH CHICOT FALLS ASLEEP.

ALL these movements of the Angevines had attracted the King's notice first, then Chicot's.

The King remained inside the Louvre, waiting impatiently for the return of his friends from their promenade with the gentlemen of Anjou.

Chicot had followed the party at a distance, had examined the situation with the sagacity for which he was preëminently distinguished, and, after seeing enough to be convinced of the purpose of Bussy and Quélus, had turned back and gone to the dwelling of Monsoreau.

Monsoreau was cunning, beyond a doubt, but not cunning enough to throw dust in the eyes of Chicot. The Gascon brought many a message of condolence from the King, and so it was impossible for the grand huntsman to receive him otherwise than courteously.

Chicot found Monsoreau in bed.

His visit to the duke the night before had completely relaxed the springs of an organization not yet restored to its former vigor, and Rémy, with his chin in his hand, was watching fretfully the first attacks of the fever that threatened to seize its victim a second time.

Still, he was able to talk and even to conceal, to some extent, his hatred of the Duc d'Anjou so skilfully that any other than Chicot might not have suspected its existence. But

his very reticence and discretion helped the Gascon to fathom his thoughts.

"The fact of the matter is," thought Chicot, "no one would express such devotion to M. d'Anjou as he does, without having some underhand motive for doing so."

Chicot, who had had a good deal of experience in the matter of invalids, wanted to find out whether the count's fever was not a farce, somewhat like that played once upon a time by M. Nicolas David.

However, when he observed the expression of Rémy's face as he felt the patient's pulse he said to himself:

"The man is really ill. He is not fit for any enterprise. Now let us see what M. de Bussy is doing."

And he ran to the Hôtel de Bussy, which was in a blaze of light and plunged in savory odors that would have drawn from Gorenflot exclamations of ecstatic delight.

"Is the festival for M. de Bussy's marriage?" he asked a lackey.

"No, monsieur," replied the latter; "M. de Bussy has become reconciled with several noblemen of the court, and they are celebrating the reconciliation by a banquet, and such a banquet! There never was the like of it!"

"Unless he should poison them, and I know Bussy is incapable of such a trick as that," thought Chicot, "there's no danger for his Majesty in this direction."

He returned to the Louvre and went to the armory, in which Henri was walking up and down, cursing and swearing at a great rate.

The King had sent three couriers for Quéhus, and as neither he nor his companions saw any reason why his Majesty should be so uneasy, they had stopped on their return from Bussy's at the house of M. de Birague, where every one in the livery of the King was sure to find a full glass, a slice of ham, and preserved fruit.

It was the method adopted by the Biragues to keep in favor at court.

When Chicot appeared at the door of Henri's cabinet, the latter uttered a loud cry.

"Oh! my dear friend," he said, "do you know what is become of them?"

"Of whom? Your minions?"

"Alas! yes, my poor friends!"

"They must lie very low by this time," answered Chicot.

"They have killed them!" cried Henri, leaping up, a threatening look in his eyes; "they are dead!"

"Dead, I am afraid that they are" —

"You know it and you laugh, pagan!"

"Have patience, my son. Yes, dead, dead drunk."

"Oh! you mountebank, how you frightened me! But why are you always calumniating these gentlemen?"

"On the contrary, I'm always eulogizing them."

"You are always jeering — come, try and be serious. I beg. You know they went out with the Angevines?"

"I should think I know it!"

"Well, with what result?"

"With the result I mentioned: they are dead drunk, or very near it."

"But Bussy, Bussy?"

"Bussy is fuddling them; he's a very dangerous man."

"For merey's sake, Chicot!"

"What! am I not right? Bussy is giving them a dinner, I tell you, giving your friends a dinner. How do you like that, my son? eh?"

"Bussy giving them a dinner! Oh, impossible; they are sworn enemies."

"Exactly; if they were friends they wouldn't need to get drunk together. Listen, how are your legs?"

"What do you mean?"

"Are you able to walk to the river?"

"I would walk to the end of the world to witness such a thing."

"You need n't go so far; go to the Hôtel de Bussy and you'll see this miracle!"

"You'll come with me?"

"Thanks, I am just from there."

"But, Chicot" —

"No, no; don't you understand that I who have seen the whole thing do not require to be convinced? Besides, my legs are three inches shorter than they were yesterday; I have driven them into my belly by walking so much. If I go on at this gait, my legs will soon begin at the knees. Go yourself, my son, go."

The King flashed an angry glance at him.

"It is very good-natured of you," said Chicot, "to fly into a

passion for the sake of these people. They laugh and make merry and intrigue against your government. In such an emergency, it behooveth us, my Henri, to withstand them like the philosophers we are; they laugh, let us laugh; they dine, have something good and hot served up at once; they intrigue, let us go to bed after supper."

The King could not help smiling.

"Then you will have the proud consolation," continued Chicot, "of knowing that you are a true sage. France has had her long-haired kings, her bold king, her great king, her slothful kings; I'm sure they'll call you Henri the Patient — Ah! my son, patience is such a beautiful virtue — especially in a person who does n't happen to have any other!"

"Betrayed!" said the King to himself. "betrayed — these people have n't even the manners of gentlemen."

"Aha! aha! so you're troubled on account of your friends still, are you?" cried Chicot, pushing the King before him into the hall in which supper had been just served, "you first bewail them as dead, and, when you are told they are not dead, you are as tearful and troubled as ever. Henri, you'll always be a whimperer."

"You try my patience too much, M. Chicot."

"Come, now, try and be a little consistent; would you rather see each of them with seven or eight rapier-thrusts in his stomach?"

"I should like to be able to rely on my friends," said Henri, in a gloomy voice.

"Oh, *ventre de biche!* rely on me, I am still with you, my son; but you'll have to feed me. Please, some pheasant — and truffles," he added, stretching out his plate.

Henri and his only friend went to bed early, the King sighing because his heart was so empty, Chicot breathless because his stomach was so full.

The next day MM. de Quélus, Schomberg, Maugiron, and D'Épernon presented themselves at the *petit lever* of the King; the usher opened the portière for the gentlemen, as he was in the habit of doing.

Chicot was still sleeping; the King had been unable to sleep. He jumped from his bed in a rage, and, tearing off the perfumed cloths that covered his cheeks and hands:

"Begone!" he cried, "begone!"

The usher, completely taken aback, explained to the young

men that the King dismissed them. They stared at one another, in bewilderment.

"But, sire," stammered Quélus, "we wanted to tell your Majesty" —

"That you are no longer drunk," shouted Henri, "eh?"

Chicot opened an eye.

"Excuse me, sire," said Quélus, gravely, "your Majesty is mistaken."

"And yet I haven't drunk the wine of Anjou, I haven't!"

"Ah, very good, very good, indeed!" said Quélus, with a smile, "I understand now — Well" —

"Well! — well what?"

"If your Majesty will remain alone with us, we will tell you."

"I hate drunkards and traitors."

"Sire!" cried the three gentlemen in chorus.

"Patience, gentlemen," said Quélus, interrupting them; "his Majesty slept badly and has had a nightmare. Just a word with him, and our highly venerated prince will be thoroughly awake."

This impertinent apology, made by a subject for his king, impressed Henri. He conjectured that people who were bold enough to utter such words could hardly have done anything dishonorable.

"Speak," said he, "and be brief."

"If I can, sire, but I shall find it difficult."

"Yes — it is natural to turn and twist when certain accusations are made."

"No, sire; on the contrary, it is natural to go straight to the point," answered Quélus, looking at Chicot and the usher in a manner that was a repetition of his request for a private audience.

At a sign from the King, the usher bowed himself out. Chicot opened the other eye and said:

"Don't mind me, I sleep like a log."

CHAPTER LXXXV.

IN WHICH CHICOT WAKES.

WHEN it was seen that Chicot was such a conscientious sleeper, nobody troubled his head about him.

Besides, it had become a custom to consider Chicot as a piece of furniture belonging to the King's bedchamber.

"Your Majesty," said Quélus, inclining, "knows only half of the matter, and that half the least interesting one. Assuredly, — and no one has the least intention of denying it, — assuredly, we have dined with M. de Bussy; and I must even say, to the credit of his cook, that we have dined well."

"There was a certain Austrian or Hungarian wine, especially," said Schomberg, "that, in my opinion, was simply a wonder!"

"Oh! that growling German!" interrupted the King; "he's fond of wine, I always suspected it."

"And I was always sure of it," said Chicot. "I have seen him drunk a score of times."

Schomberg wheeled round and faced him.

"Pay no attention, my son," said the Gascon, "the King will tell you I talk in my sleep."

Schomberg turned again to the King.

"By my faith, sire," said he, "I conceal neither my likes nor dislikes; good wine is good."

"We ought not to call a thing good which makes us forget our sovereign," said the King, quietly.

Schomberg was about to reply, doubtless unwilling to abandon so excellent a cause, when Quélus made a sign to him.

"You are right," said Schomberg, "go on."

"I was saying, then, sire," continued Quélus, "that during the banquet, and particularly after it, we had some most interesting and serious conversations, dealing, for the most part, with the interests of your Majesty."

"Your exordium is rather long," said Henri, "that is a bad sign."

"*Ventre de biche!* what a babbler this Valois of ours is!" cried Chicot.

"I say, Master Gascon!" said Henri, haughtily, "if you're not asleep, get out of here."

"Hang it, man! if I'm not asleep, it's because you won't let me; your tongue rattles like the clappers on a Good Friday."

Quélus, seeing that it was impossible to talk seriously, no matter how serious the subject might be, in this royal abode where frivolity had grown to be a habit, sighed, shrugged his shoulders, and rose, evidently much annoyed.

"Sire," said D'Épernon, mincingly, "the matters Quélus is trying to bring before you are very grave, I assure you."

"Grave?" repeated Henri.

"Undoubtedly," said Quélus. "That is, if the lives of eight brave gentlemen seem to your Majesty a subject worthy of your Majesty's serious attention."

"What does this mean?" cried the King.

"This means that I am waiting until the King deign to listen to me."

"I am listening, my son, I am listening," answered Henri, laying a hand on Quélus's shoulder.

"Well, sire, I was saying that we talked seriously, and this is the result of our conversation: royalty is imperilled and enfeebled."

"Which is as much as to say that everybody is conspiring against it," cried Henri.

"It resembles," continued Quélus, "those strange gods, who, like the gods of Tiberius and Caligula, sank into old age, but could not die, and in their immortality continued to follow the pathways of human infirmities. When these gods reached the point of utter decrepitude, they could be arrested in their progress only by the beautiful devotion of some worshipper, whose self-sacrifice rejuvenated and renewed them. Then, regenerated by the transfusion of young and generous blood, they lived again, again became strong and powerful. Well, sire, your royalty resembles these gods: it can live only by sacrifices."

"His words are golden," said Clieot. "Quélus, my son, go and preach in the streets of Paris, and I'll bet an ox against an egg that you'll extinguish Lincestre, Cahier, Cotton, and even that thunderbolt of eloquence called Gorenflot."

Henri did not answer; it was evident that a great change was at work in his mind. He had at first showered scornful looks on the minions; now that an idea of the truth was getting hold of him, he became pensive, gloomy, anxious.

"Go on," said he, "you see I am listening, Quélus."

"Sire," he resumed, "you are a very great King, but you have no longer any horizon before your eyes. The nobility have erected barriers beyond which you see nothing, except, perchance, the barriers the people have raised, which are already beginning to tower above them. Well, sire, — you are a valiant soldier, and can tell us what happens in battle when one battalion is placed, like a menacing wall, within thirty yards of another battalion? Towards look behind them, and, seeing an open space, they fly; the brave lower their heads and rush on."

"Well, then, be it so; forward!" cried the King. "God's death! am I not the first gentleman in my kingdom? Were ever finer battles seen, I ask you, than those in which I was engaged in my youth? Has the century whose end we are nearing ever resounded with names more glorious than those of Jarnac and Moneconour? Forward, gentlemen, and, as was my custom, I will be the first to dash into the thick of the battle!"

"Yes, yes, sire," shouted the young men, electrified by the warlike declaration of the King, "forward!"

Chicot sat up.

"Peace, there, you fellows," said he; "let my orator continue. Go on, Quélus, my son, go on; you have said some good and fine things already, and you must say some more; continue, my friend, continue."

"Yes, Chicot, and you are right, too, as you often are. Yes, I will continue and say to his Majesty that the moment has arrived for royalty to accept one of those sacrifices of which I spoke just now. Against all these ramparts, which are insensibly closing in around your Majesty, four men are about to march, sure of being encouraged by you, sire, and of being glorified by posterity."

"What do you say, Quélus?" asked the King, his eyes gleaming with a joy that was tempered with anxiety: "who are these four men?"

"I and these gentlemen, sire," said the young man, with that sentiment of pride which ennobles every man who stakes his life on a great principle or on a great passion, "devote ourselves."

"For what?"

"For your safety."

"Against whom?"

"Against your enemies."

"Private enmities of young men," cried Henri.

"Oh, sire, that is but the expression of vulgar prejudice, as well as of your Majesty's generous concern for our safety, which you try in vain to hide beneath this transparent veil, for we recognize it: speak like a King, sire, and not like some tradesman of the Rue Saint-Denis. Do not feign to believe that Mangiron detests Antragnet, that Schomberg dislikes Livarot, that D'Épernon is jealous of Bussy, or that Quélus is embittered against Ribeirac. Oh, no! They are all young, genial, and debonair; all, friends and enemies, might easily come to love one another. It is not, therefore, a rivalry between man and man that places the swords in our hands. It is the quarrel of France with Anjou; it is the quarrel of popular right with right divine; we are marching as champions of royalty into the lists where the champions of the League stand ready to encounter us, and we come to say: 'Bless us, my sovereign liege, smile on those about to die for you. With your blessing we may, perhaps, return victors; with your smile death will not be unwelcome.'"

Henri, overcome with emotion, opened his arms to Quélus and the others. He clasped them to his heart, and it was not a spectacle without interest, a picture without expression, but a scene in which manly courage was allied to the tenderest emotions and sanctified by real devotion.

Chicot, grave and melancholy, his hand pressed to his forehead, looked on from the back of the alcove, and his face, ordinarily cold and indifferent, or cynical and sarcastic, was not the least noble and eloquent of the six.

"Ah! my heroes," said the King, after a pause, "your self-devotion is sublime, and the task you undertake a glorious one, and I am proud to-day, not of reigning over France, but of being your friend. Still, as I know my own interests better than anybody, I cannot accept a sacrifice, whose results, however magnificent they may seem to you now, would be to deliver me, if you failed, into the hands of my enemies. Believe me, the power of France suffices for a war with Anjou; I know my brother, the Guises, and the League; often during my life have I tamed horses that were more fiery and refractory."

"But, sire," said Mangiron, "soldiers do not reason thus; they cannot admit the consideration of possible bad luck into the

examination of a question of this kind, which is a question of honor, a question of sentiment, in which a man acts by conviction rather than by reason."

"Pardon me, Maugiron," answered the King; "a soldier may act blindly, but the captain reflects."

"Then, sire, do you reflect, and let us, who are only soldiers, act," said Schonberg. "Besides, I am unacquainted with ill-luck; I have always been fortunate" —

"Ah! my friend!" interrupted the King, sadly. "I cannot say as much; but then, you are hardly twenty."

"Sire," said Quélus, "your Majesty's gracious words but redouble our ardor. On what day shall we cross swords with MM. de Bussy, Livarot, Antraguët, and Ribeirac?"

"Never. I forbid it absolutely; never; do you hear me?"

"Deign to excuse us, sire," answered Quélus; "but the appointment was made yesterday before dinner, the word has been spoken and we cannot withdraw it."

"Excuse me, monsieur," said Henri; "the King absolves from all oaths and promises by simply saying: 'I will or I will not;' for the King is omnipotence itself. Tell these gentlemen I have threatened you with my anger if you fight, and, that you yourselves may not doubt that such is the case, I swear to banish you if" —

"Stop, sire," said Quélus, "for, if you can absolve us in relation to our words, God alone can absolve you in relation to yours. Swear not, then, sire, because, if for such a reason we have deserved your anger, and if the issue of that anger should be our banishment, we will go into exile joyfully; for, when we are no longer within your Majesty's territories, we can then keep our word and meet our adversaries in a foreign country."

"If these gentlemen approach you within range even of an arquebuse," cried Henri, "I will have the whole four of them thrown into the Bastile."

"Sire," said Quélus, "upon whatever day your Majesty should act thus, we would go barefooted and with ropes about our necks to Maître Laurent Testu, the governor, and beg him to imprison us along with these gentlemen."

"God's death! I will have their heads cut off; I am the King, I presume."

"If our enemies met with such a fate, sire, we would cut our throats at the foot of their scaffold."

Henri kept silent for a long time; then, raising his dark eyes:

"Well and good!" said he, "if God did not bless a cause defended by such brave and noble persons as I see before me" —

"Be not impious — do not blaspheme!" said Chicot, solemnly, arising from his couch and addressing the King. "Yes, these are noble hearts. Great heavens! do as they wish; do you hear me, my master: come, fix a day for these young gentlemen: that is your business now, and not to dictate to God his duty."

"O God! O God!" murmured Henri.

"Sire, we beseech you," said the four gentlemen, with bowed heads and bended knees.

"Well, be it so! God is just, he must grant us the victory. But let us prepare for our task in a Christian and judicious manner. Dear friends, remember that Jarnac punctually performed his devotions before fighting with La Chateigneraie: the latter was a first-rate swordsman; but he forget his religion in feasting and revelry, visited women, — an abominable sin! In short, he tempted God, who would, perhaps, have smiled on his youth, beauty, and vigor, and saved his life; and yet he was hamstrung by Jarnac. Listen; we will engage in certain devotional exercises. If I had time I would send your swords to Rome to be blessed by the Holy Father — But we have the shrine of Sainte Geneviève, the relics in which are equal to the best. Let us fast and punish our bodies, and, above all, let us sanctify the great festival of Corpus Christi; then, on the day after" —

"Ah, sire, thanks! thanks!" cried the four young gentlemen; "it will be in a week, then."

And they seized the hands of the King, who embraced them all once more: then he entered his oratory, weeping bitterly.

"Our cartel is drawn up," said Quélus; "we have but to add the day and the hour to it. Write, Maugiron, on this table with the King's pen; write: 'The day after Corpus Christi.'"

"It is done," answered Maugiron; "who is the herald that is to carry the letter?"

"I, if you have no objection," said Chicot, coming up to them; "only, I want to give you an advice, my children. His Majesty talks of fasting, punishing the body, etc. Nothing could be better, if you should make a vow to do so after the

victory. But before the combat, I should, I fancy, have more reliance on the efficaciousness of good food, generous wine, and a good eight hours' sleep, taken either by day or by night. Nothing gives such suppleness and strength to the wrist as three hours spent at table, provided, of course, that there is no intoxication. I approve all the King says on the subject of love; it is too soul-subduing, and you want all your courage: you will do well to wean yourselves from it."

"Bravo, Chicot," chorused all the young men.

"Adieu, my young lions," answered the Gascon. "I am going to the Hôtel de Bussy."

He went three steps and then turned back.

"By the way," said he, "do not leave the King's side during our fine festival of Corpus Christi; and let not a single one of you go into the country; stay in the Louvre like a little cluster of paladins. You agree, don't you? — eh? yes. Then I'll do your commission."

And Chicot, with the letter in his hand, opened his long legs as if they were a pair of compasses and disappeared.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

CORPUS CHRISTI.

DURING this week events were gathering as a tempest gathers in the depths of the heavens during the calm and heavy days of summer.

After an attack of fever that lasted twenty-four hours, Mon-soreau rallied and devoted all his energies to the task of watching for the spoiler of his honor; but as he made no discovery, he became more convinced than ever of the Duc d'Anjou's hypocrisy and of his evil designs on Diane.

During the day Bussy kept up his visits to the house of the grand hunter.

Warned, however, by Rémy that his patient was constantly on the watch, he gave up entering at night through the window.

Chicot divided his time into two parts.

The one was devoted to his beloved master, Henri de Valois, whom he quitted as little as possible and guarded as carefully as a mother does her babe.

The other was for his affectionate friend Gorenflot, whom he had, with great difficulty, persuaded to return to his cell a week before, he himself acting as his guide and receiving the most courteous reception from the abbot, Messire Joseph Foulon.

At this first interview much had been spoken of the King's piety, and the prior seemed in ecstasies of gratitude when he learned of the honor the King was about to do the abbey by visiting it.

The honor was enhanced by the fact that, in compliance with the request of the venerable abbot, Henri was said to have consented to spend the day and the night in retreat in the convent.

Chicot assured the abbot that the expectation, which he hardly ventured to entertain, would be realized, and, as it was known that Chicot had the King's ear, he was invited to return, which Chicot promised to do.

As for Gorenflot, he grew six cubits taller in the estimation of the monks.

And it was really one of Gorenflot's master-strokes to have been so successful in securing Chicot's entire confidence: why, the wily Machiavelli could not have done better!

Being invited to return, Chicot returned, and as he brought with him, stowed away under his cloak or in his pockets or wide boots, flasks of wine of the rarest and most perfect vintage, he received a warmer welcome from Brother Gorenflot than even from Messire Joseph Foulon.

Then he would shut himself up in the monk's cell for entire hours, sharing, according to general rumor, his studies and his ecstasies.

The eve of Corpus Christi, he spent even the whole night in the convent; the next day it was whispered through the cloisters that Gorenflot had persuaded Chicot to take the robe.

As for the King, he passed the time in giving excellent fencing-lessons to his friends, especially to D'Épernon, to whom fate had allotted so dangerous an adversary, and who was visibly alarmed by the near approach of the decisive day.

Any one who happened to be rambling through the city at certain hours during the night would have encountered in the Quartier Sainte-Geneviève the singular-looking monks of whom our readers have had some description in the earlier chapters.

and who bore a much closer resemblance to reiters than to friars.

Finally, to complete our picture, we might add that the Hôtel de Guise had become the most mysterious, noisy, and populous caravansary interiorly and the most deserted exteriorly that can well be imagined; that clandestine meetings were held every night in the grand hall, after the blinds and windows had been hermetically closed; that these meetings were preceded by dinners to which none but men were invited, and yet they were presided over by Madame de Montpensier.

We are forced to supply our readers with these details, gathered from the memoirs of the period, because they would never find them among the archives of the police.

In fact, the police of this beneficent reign had not even a suspicion of the plot that was being hatched under its very nose, although this plot, as we shall see afterward, was to have important consequences; and as for the worthy citizens who made their nightly rounds, sallet on head and halberd in hand, they had no suspicion, either, being a sort of folk incapable of scenting out any peril except that which arose from fire, thieves, mad dogs, and quarrelsome tipplers.

Now and then a patrol would halt in front of the Belle-Étoile, Rue de l'Arbre-Sec. But Maître la Hurière was known to be such a zealous Catholic that the great noise heard in his hostelry was assumed to be created by persons wishful of extending the glory of God.

Such was the condition of affairs in the city of Paris when the morning of the great solemnity called Corpus Christi arrived, a solemnity that has been abolished by our constitutional government.

It was a beautiful morning; the weather was superb, and the flowers, strewed along the streets, sent their perfumes through the air.

On this morning Chicot, who for the last fortnight had slept every night in the King's room, awoke Henri early; nobody as yet had entered the King's bedchamber.

"A plague on you, my poor Chicot!" cried Henri; "you always select the most unseasonable moment. You have broken in upon the most delightful dream I ever had in my life."

"And what was your dream, my son?" asked Chicot.

"I dreamed that Quélus had run Antraguët through the

body with a seagoon, and that he was swimming in the blood of his enemy. But it is daylight, my friend. Let us go and pray that my dream may be realized. Call, Chicot, call!"

"Why, what do you want?"

"My hair-shirt and scourges."

"Would n't a good breakfast be better?" inquired Chicot.

"Pagan!" cried Henri; "who would hear Mass on Corpus Christi with a full stomach?"

"You're right."

"Call, Chicot, call."

"Patience," said Chicot, "it's not yet eight, and you have the whole day to wallop yourself in. Let us have a little chat first; won't you chat with your friend, Valois? Chicot pledges you his word that you will not repent of it."

"Talk away," said Henri, "but do it quick."

"How shall we divide our day, my son?"

"Into three parts."

"In honor of the Blessed Trinity, I see, very good. And now for these three parts."

"First, mass at Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois."

"Good."

"Return to the Louvre for collation."

"Very good!"

"Then processions of penitents through the streets, stopping to make stations in the chief convents of Paris, beginning with the Jacobins and ending with Sainte Geneviève, where I have promised the prior to go on a retreat until to-morrow in the cell of a sort of saint who will spend the night praying for the success of our arms."

"I know him."

"The saint?"

"Perfectly."

"So much the better; you shall accompany me, Chicot; we will pray together."

"Yes, you may rest easy in your mind about that."

"Then, dress yourself and come."

"Wait a moment."

"What for?"

"I have a few more questions to put to you."

"Can't you put them while my people are making my toilet?"

"I prefer putting them while we are alone."

"Then do so speedily, the time is passing."

"What about the court?"

"It will follow me."

"And your brother?"

"Accompanies me."

"And your guards?"

"The French guards will wait for me at the Louvre with Crillon; the Swiss at the gate of the abbey."

"Capital!" said Chicot. "I have now all the information I want."

"I may call, then?"

"Yes, call away."

Henri struck a bell.

"The ceremony will be magnificent," continued Chicot.

"God will be pleased with us, I hope."

"We'll know that to-morrow. But say, Henri, before anybody enter, have you nothing else to tell me?"

"No. Have I omitted any of the details of the ceremonial?"

"It is not of that I am speaking."

"Then of what are you speaking?"

"Of nothing."

"But you ask me" —

"If it is quite settled that you are to go to the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève?"

"Decidedly."

"And that you are to pass the night there?"

"I promised to do so."

"Well, if you have nothing to say to me, my son, I have something to say to you, and it is that this programme does not suit me at all."

"Does n't suit you?"

"No, and when we have dined" —

"When we have dined?"

"I will tell you of another arrangement I have figured out."

"Well, I consent to it."

"Even if you did n't consent, my son, it would still be all the same."

"What do you mean?"

"Hush! your valets are in the antechamber."

No sooner were these words out of Chicot's mouth than the usher opened the portières, and the barber, perfumer, and a *valet de chambre* entered. They took entire possession of the

King and performed on his august person one of those operations which we have already described in the beginning of this work.

When the toilet was about two-thirds finished, his highness the Duc d'Anjou was announced.

Henri turned round and called up his best smiles to receive him.

The duke was accompanied by M. de Monsoreau, D'Épernon, and Aurilly.

D'Épernon and Aurilly stood behind him.

At the sight of the count, still pale and looking more frightful than ever, Henri gave a start of surprise.

The duke noticed the movement, which did not escape the count, either.

"Sire," said the duke, "M. de Monsoreau has come to pay homage to your Majesty."

"Thanks, monsieur," said Henri, "and I am the more touched by your visit because you have been wounded, have you not?"

"Yes, sire."

"While out hunting, was it not?"

"While out hunting, sire."

"But you are better now, I hope?"

"I am entirely recovered."

"Sire," said the Duc d'Anjou, "would it not please you to have M. de Monsoreau get up a hunt for us in the woods of Compiègne, after our devotions are finished?"

"But," said Henri, "are you not aware that to-morrow" —

He was about to say "four of your friends are about to fight four of mine;" but he remembered that the secret must have been kept, and he paused.

"I am not aware of anything, sire," returned the Duc d'Anjou, "and if your Majesty will inform me" —

"I meant," answered Henri, "that as I am to spend to-night in prayer at the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève, I could not be ready, perhaps, to-morrow. But M. le Comte may set out, notwithstanding. If the hunt do not take place to-morrow, we can have it the day after."

"You understand?" said the duke to Monsoreau, who bowed.

"Yes, monseigneur," replied the count.

At this moment Schomberg and Quélns entered. The King received them with open arms.

"Another day," said Quélus, saluting the King.

"And more than a day, fortunately," said Schomberg.

During this time Monsoreau was saying to the Duc d'Anjou :

"You are having me exiled, monseigneur."

"Is it not the grand huntsman's duty to arrange the King's hunts?" answered François, with a laugh.

"I understand," replied Monsoreau, "and I see clearly how matters stand. The week's delay which your highness asked of me expires this evening, and your highness prefers to send me to Compiègne rather than keep your promise. But let your highness beware. Before night I can with a single word" —

François seized the count by the wrist.

"Silence," said he; "I will keep this promise whose fulfilment you claim."

"Explain yourself."

"Your departure will be publicly known, since the order is official."

"Well?"

"Well, you will not go, but you will hide in the neighborhood of your house; then, believing you away, the man you wished to discover will come. The rest concerns yourself; for this is all I promised, if I am not mistaken."

"Ah!" exclaimed Monsoreau, "if this be so" —

"You have my word for it," said the duke.

"I have better than that, monseigneur; I have your signature," said Monsoreau.

"Oh, yes, *mordieu!* I know that well."

And the duke left Monsoreau, and went up to his brother. Aurilly touched D'Épernon's arm.

"It is all up," said he.

"What is all up?" asked D'Épernon.

"M. de Bussy will not fight to-morrow."

"M. de Bussy will not fight to-morrow?"

"You may take my word for it."

"And who will prevent him?"

"What matter, so long as he doesn't fight."

"If that be so, there are a thousand crowns at your service, my dear sorcerer."

"Gentlemen," said the King, who had finished his toilet, "now for Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois."

“ And from there to the Abbey of Sainte Geneviève ? ” asked the duke.

“ Certainly,” answered the King.

“ You may stake your life on it,” said Chicot, buckling on his belt.

And Henri passed into the gallery, where his whole court were waiting for him.

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

WHICH WILL MAKE THE PRECEDING CHAPTER CLEARER.

ON the previous evening, when the Guises and the Angevines had agreed upon their plans, and formed all their arrangements for carrying them out, M. de Monsoreau had returned to his house, where he found Bussy.

Then, fearing that this brave gentlemen, for whom he still entertained the warmest friendship, might be sadly compromised the next day, as he knew nothing of what was likely to occur, he took him aside.

“ My dear count,” he had said, “ would you permit me to give you a bit of advice ? ”

“ Why not ? You will confer a favor on me by doing so,” had been Bussy’s answer.

“ If I were in your place, I think I should go away from Paris to-morrow.”

“ I ! And for what reason, pray ? ”

“ All I can tell you is that your absence would, in all probability, save you from great trouble.”

“ From great trouble ? ” asked Bussy, looking into the count’s eyes with a searching gaze. “ And what is the trouble ? ”

“ Are you ignorant of what is to occur to-morrow ? ”

“ Completely.”

“ Upon your honor ? ”

“ Upon my honor as a gentleman.”

“ And M. d’Anjou has said nothing to you ? ”

“ Nothing. M. d’Anjou trusts me only with matters which he tells everybody, and I will add, with matters anybody can find out for himself.”

“ Well, I who am not the Duc d’Anjou and who love my friends for their own sakes and not for mine, I will tell you that there

are plans in preparation which may lead to grave issues to-morrow, and that the parties of Anjou and Guise are contemplating a stroke which may result in the King's abdication."

Bussy stared at M. de Monsoreau distrustfully, but it was impossible to make any mistake as to the perfect frankness which marked the expression of his face.

"Count," he answered, "I belong to the Duc d'Anjou, as you know. "that is to say, my life and sword belong to him. The King, whom I have never really attempted to injure, is set against me, and never misses an opportunity of saying or doing something to hurt me. And to-morrow, even," continued Bussy, lowering his voice. — "I tell this to you, but to you alone, you understand? — to-morrow I am about to risk my life to humble Henri de Valois in the person of his favorites."

"So," inquired Monsoreau, "you are resolved to stand the hazard of your attachment to the Duc d'Anjou, with all its consequences?"

"Yes."

"You know where all this will lead you, I suppose?"

"I know where I am determined to stop; whatever reason I may have to complain of the King, I will never raise a hand against the Lord's anointed; but I will let others act as they like, and, while never challenging or attacking any one, I will follow M. d'Anjou and defend him if he be exposed to danger."

M. de Monsoreau reflected a moment, and, placing his hand on Bussy's shoulder:

"My dear count," said he, "the Duc d'Anjou is a miscreant, a coward, and a traitor, a man capable of sacrificing his most faithful friend, his most devoted servant, to his jealousy or to his fears. Dear count, abandon him, take a friend's advice; go and spend the day at your little house in Vincennes, go wherever you like, but do not go to the procession on Corpus Christi."

Bussy looked at him keenly.

"Then why do you follow the Duc d'Anjou yourself?" asked he.

"Because, in connection with certain matters that concern my honor, I have need of him still, at least, for a time," answered the count.

"Well, you are like me," said Bussy; "I follow the duke on account of matters that concern my honor also."

The Comte de Monsoreau pressed Bussy's hand, and they parted.

We have told, in the foregoing chapter, what occurred on the next day at the King's levée.

Monsoreau returned home and informed his wife of his departure for Compiègne, at the same time giving orders to have everything in readiness for this departure.

Diane heard the news with joy.

She learned from her husband of the duel between Bussy and D'Épernon, but, as D'Épernon had less reputation for courage and skill than the other minions, there was more pride than fear in her emotions with regard to the next day's combat.

Bussy had gone in the morning to the Hôtel d'Anjou and accompanied the duke to the Louvre, remaining himself, however, in the gallery.

When the prince left his brother he took him along with him, and the whole royal procession moved toward Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois.

Seeing Bussy so frank, loyal, and devoted, the prince felt some passing remorse; but there were two things that banished this sentiment from his heart: one of them was the very influence Bussy had acquired over him, the sort of influence a vigorous mind must always acquire over a weak mind, — he feared that if Bussy stood near his throne when he was king, Bussy would be the real sovereign; the other was Bussy's love for Madame de Monsoreau, a love that aroused all the pangs of jealousy in the very depths of the prince's soul.

However, as Monsoreau inspired him with almost as much uneasiness as Bussy, he had said to himself:

“Either Bussy will accompany me, sustain me by his valor, and secure the triumph of my cause, — and when I am triumphant, what Monsoreau says or does matters little, — or Bussy will forsake me, and then I owe him nothing, and will forsake him in my turn.”

The result of this double reflection, of which Bussy was the subject, was that the prince never took his eyes off the young man for a moment.

He saw him enter the church, serene and smiling, after courteously making way for his antagonist, M. d'Épernon, and then kneel a little in rear.

The prince beckoned to Bussy to come to him. In the position he occupied, he was obliged to turn his head round

entirely; with his gentleman beside him on the left, he had only to turn his eyes.

About a quarter of an hour after mass had begun, Rémy entered the church and knelt beside his master. The duke started at the appearance of the young doctor, whom he knew to be a sharer of all Bussy's secrets.

In a moment or so, after a few words interchanged in an undertone, Rémy passed a note to the count.

The prince felt a thrill in every vein: the superscription was in a delicate, beautiful handwriting.

"From her!" said he; "she is telling him that her husband is leaving Paris."

Bussy slipped the note into the bottom of his hat, opened and read it.

The prince no longer saw the note, but he saw Bussy's face, radiant with love and joy.

"Ah! woe to you if you do not accompany me!" he murmured.

Bussy raised the note to his lips, and then placed it inside his doublet, next his heart.

The duke looked round. If Monsoreau had been there, he would not have had the patience, perhaps, to wait till evening to denounce Bussy to him.

As soon as mass was over, the procession returned to the Louvre, where a collation was ready for the King in his apartments, and another for the gentlemen in the gallery.

The Swiss formed a line from the gate of the Louvre to the palace.

Crillon and the French guards were drawn up in the courtyard.

Chicot was watching the King as intently as the Duc d'Anjou was watching Bussy.

After entering the Louvre the latter approached the duke.

"Excuse me, monseigneur," he said, bowing; "might I say a few words to your highness?"

"Are you in a hurry?" asked the duke.

"In a great hurry, monseigneur."

"Could you not say them during the procession? We shall walk side by side."

"Your highness will pardon me; but the reason why I stopped your highness was to request you not to ask me to accompany you."

"Why so?" inquired the duke, in a voice the change in which he could not utterly conceal.

"Monseigneur, to-morrow is to be a very important day, as your highness is well aware, since it is to decide the quarrel between Anjou and France; I wish to retire to my little house at Vincennes, and spend the entire day in seclusion."

"And so you will not join the procession, although the King and his whole court form a part of it?"

"No, monseigneur; always, of course, with the permission of your highness."

"And so you will not return to my side even at Sainte Geneviève?"

"Monseigneur, I wish to have the whole day to myself."

"But if it should happen during the day that I should have special need of my friends" —

"As your highness could only need me for the purpose of drawing my sword against your King, I must, for a still stronger reason, ask your highness to grant my request; my sword is pledged to meet only M. d'Épernon."

Monsoreau had told the prince the evening before that he might rely on Bussy. Everything had changed since then, and the change came wholly from the note brought to the church by Le Haudonin.

"So," said the duke, from between his closed teeth, "you desert your lord and master, Bussy?"

"Monseigneur," answered Bussy, "the man who is to stake his life to-morrow in a furious, bloody, and deadly duel, as, I answer for it, ours is sure to be, has but one master, and to that master shall my last devotions be paid."

"You know I am playing for a throne and you forsake me."

"Monseigneur, I have worked pretty well for you; I will work for you again to-morrow. Do not ask me for more than my life."

"T is well!" replied the duke, in a hollow voice; "you are free; go, M. de Bussy."

Bussy, undisturbed by the prince's sudden coldness, saluted, went down the staircase of the Louvre, and, once outside, made his way home with as much speed as possible.

The duke summoned Aurilly.

Aurilly appeared.

"Well, monseigneur?" inquired the lute-player.

"Well, he has condemned himself!"

"He will not follow you?"

"No."

"He goes to keep the appointment made in the note?"

"Yes."

"Then it is for this evening?"

"For this evening."

"Has M. de Monsoreau been warned?"

"As to the rendezvous, yes; as to the man he will find at the rendezvous, not yet."

"You are determined to sacrifice the count?"

"I am determined to have revenge," said the prince. "I have but one fear now."

"What is it?"

"That Monsoreau may trust to his strength and address and that Bussy may escape him."

"Monseigneur, you need not be alarmed, as far as that's concerned."

"How so?"

"Have you condemned M. de Bussy irrevocably?"

"Yes, *mordieu*! — a man who treats me like a schoolboy; who deprives me of my will and puts his own in place of it; who takes my mistress from me and makes her his; a sort of lion of whom I am not so much the master as I am the keeper. Yes, yes, Aurilly, he is condemned, without appeal and without mercy."

"Well, as I said before, your highness need not be uneasy; if he escape Monsoreau, he will not escape from another."

"And who is this other?"

"Does monseigneur order me to name him?"

"Yes, I order you."

"It is M. d'Épernon."

"D'Épernon, who is to fight with him to-morrow?"

"Yes, monseigneur."

"Tell me all about the matter."

Aurilly was about to give the information asked for, when the duke was called away. The King was at table and was surprised at the absence of the Duc d'Anjou, or rather, Chicot had brought his absence to Henri's notice, and the latter had sent for his brother.

"You can tell me more during the procession," said the duke.

And he followed the usher who had come for him.

As we shall not have leisure to accompany the duke and Aurilly through the streets of Paris, our attention being claimed by a greater personage than either of them, we had better tell our readers what had passed between D'Épernon and the lute-player.

In the morning, about daybreak, D'Épernon had gone to the Hôtel d'Anjou and inquired for Aurilly.

The two gentlemen had been long acquainted.

The musician had taught the royal favorite to play on the lute, and pupil and teacher had often met to scrape the violoncello or thrum the viol, as was the fashion at the time, not only in Spain, but in France.

The result was that a rather tender friendship, tempered by etiquette, existed between them.

Moreover, the wily Gaseon was a diplomatist to the tips of his fingers, and considered there was no better way of reaching the masters than through their servants; so there were very few of the Duc d'Anjou's secrets of which D'Épernon was not cognizant through Aurilly.

Owing to this Machiavellian policy, he managed to keep on the side both of the King and of the prince, so that should the latter ascend the throne, he was pretty sure of not having an enemy in his future sovereign.

His object in visiting Aurilly was to discuss the approaching duel with Bussy.

This duel was a source of constant anxiety to him.

At any period of his life, bravery had never been one of his shining characteristics; now, to meet Bussy coolly in single combat would require more than bravery, it would require utter recklessness; to fight with him was to encounter almost certain death.

Those who had essayed the experiment had measured their length on the ground, from which they had never arisen.

At the first word spoken by D'Épernon on the subject he had so much at heart, the musician, who was well aware of his master's secret hatred for Bussy, expressed the utmost sympathy for his pupil, told him, with affectionate concern, that for the last week Bussy had practised fencing two hours every morning with a trumpeter of the guards, the most dangerous swordsman ever known in Paris, a sort of artist in cutting and thrusting, a traveller and philosopher also, who had borrowed from the Italians their cautious play, from the Spaniards their

brilliant and subtle feints, from the Germans the firmness of the wrist and their method of parrying and lunging, and, finally, from the savage Poles, then known as Sarmatians, their springs and bounds, their sudden prostrations, and their close embrace, body to body. During this long enumeration of the chances against him D'Épernon in his terror actually gnawed off all the carmine that glazed his finger-nails.

"Why, I'm a dead man!" said he, half laughing, but turning pale.

"I'm afraid it looks that way," answered Aurilly.

"But it is absurd!" cried D'Épernon: "to go out with a man who is sure to kill you! It's the same as playing dice with a man who is safe to throw up the double six every time!"

"You ought to have thought of that before making your engagement, M. le Duc."

"Hang it," said D'Épernon, "I'll not keep it. I was n't born in Gascony for nothing. Give up the ghost of your own free will, and you just twenty-five! — not such an idiot. But, now I think of it — yes, that's logical; listen" —

"I'm all attention."

"M. de Bussy is sure to kill me, you say?"

"I don't doubt about it for a moment."

"Then, if that be the case, it is n't a duel; it is an assassination."

"My opinion, exactly."

"And if it is an assassination" —

"Well?"

"It is lawful to anticipate an assassination by" —

"By?"

"By — a murder."

"Undoubtedly."

"Since he wants to kill me, what the devil hinders me from killing him first?"

"Great heavens! nothing at all. The very thing I was thinking of myself."

"Is not my reasoning logical, then?"

"As clear as day."

"And natural?"

"Nothing could be more so."

"But, instead of cruelly killing him with my own hands, as he would kill me, well, I have a horror of blood, and so I'll leave the job to some one else."

“ Which means you will hire braves ? ”

“ By my faith, yes : just as M. de Guise and M. de Mayenne did for Saint-Mégrin.”

“ It will cost you dear.”

“ I’ll spend three thousand crowns on it.”

“ But when your braves learn the name of the man they’re to settle.—you can’t get more than six of them for three thousand crowns.”

“ And is not that enough ? ”

“ Six enough ! Why. M. de Bussy would do up four of the six with a mere wave of his hand. Remember the skirmish in the Rue Saint-Antoine, when he wounded Schomberg in the thigh, and you in the arm, and almost gave Quélus his quietus ! ”

“ I’ll spend six thousand, if necessary,” said D’Épernon. “ *Mordieu !* if the thing is to be done at all, it must be well done, so well done that he’ll have no chance of escaping.”

“ You have your men ? ”

“ Oh,” replied D’Épernon, “ I know plenty of fellows who have nothing to do, disbanded soldiers here and there, plucky rascals who are quite as good as the braves in Florence and Venice.”

“ Capital, but be cautious.”

“ Why ? ”

“ If they fail, they’ll denounce you.”

“ But the King is on my side.”

“ It’s something, but the King can’t hinder M. de Bussy from killing you.”

“ True, perfectly true,” said D’Épernon, thoughtfully.

“ I think I could point out an arrangement that would make things safe.”

“ Tell it to me, my good friend.”

“ Would you have any objection to making common cause with another enemy of Bussy’s ? ”

“ I should object to nothing that would double my chances and enable me to get rid of that mad dog.”

“ Well, a certain enemy of your enemy is jealous.”

“ Ah ! ah ! ”

“ So that, at this very hour ” —

“ Well, at this very hour — can’t you finish ? ”

“ He is laying a snare for him.”

“ Go on.”

“ But he lacks money. With six thousand crowns he could

easily manage to settle your business as well as his own. You are not anxious, I presume, to enjoy the credit of this bold stroke?"

"Good God, no! all I want is to be left in the background."

"Then have your men sent to the rendezvous, without letting them know you sent them, and he will turn them to account."

"But, though my men may not know me, I should certainly know this man."

"I will point him out to you this very morning."

"Where?"

"In the Louvre."

"So he is a gentleman?"

"Yes."

"Then you shall have the six thousand crowns immediately, Aurilly."

"So the matter is settled?"

"Irrevocably."

"To the Louvre, then!"

"To the Louvre."

We have seen in the preceding chapter how Aurilly said to D'Épernon:

"M. de Bussy will not fight to-morrow."

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

THE PROCESSION.

WHEN the collation was finished, the King entered his room with Chicot, and, soon afterward, made his appearance in penitential garb, with bare feet, a cord around his waist, and a hood which was pulled down over his face.

During his absence the courtiers had made the same toilet.

The weather was magnificent, the pavements were strewn with flowers, and the splendor of the *reposoirs* was reported to be beyond description, especially that of the *reposoir* erected by the monks of Sainte Geneviève in the crypt of their chapel.

Immense crowds of people lined the way which led to the four stations that were to be made by the King at the Jacobins Carmelites, Capuchins, and Genevievans.

The clergy of Saint Germain-l'Auxerrois headed the procession. The archbishop of Paris bore the blessed sacrament. Between the clergy and the archbishop young boys and girls walked backward, the former swinging censers, the latter scattering roses.

Then came the King with bare feet, as we have said, and followed by his four friends, barefooted also and robed in the same fashion.

The Duc d'Anjou was next, but in his ordinary costume; all his Angevine courtiers accompanied him, mingled with the great dignitaries of the crown, who marched behind the prince, each in the order assigned him by etiquette.

Then came the citizens and the populace.

It was already past one o'clock when they quitted the Louvre.

Crillon and the French guards wished to follow the King, but the latter signified by a gesture that it was not necessary, and so Crillon and his guards stayed behind to protect the palace.

It was not until nearly six in the evening that, after having made the stations at the different *reposoirs*, the head of the procession got a glimpse of the delicately carved porch of the ancient abbey and of the Genevievans, who, with their prior at their head, were drawn up on the three steps that formed the threshold to receive his Majesty.

Between the abbey and the last station, which had been made at the convent of the Capuchins, the Duc d'Anjou, who had been on his feet since morning, had discovered that he was utterly exhausted; he had, therefore requested the King to allow him to retire to his hôtel; the King at once gave the required permission.

His gentlemen had immediately separated from the procession and followed him, as if to proclaim aloud that they belonged to the duke and not to the King.

But their real reason was that, as three among them should have to fight the next day, they did not think it desirable to overtask the strength of these champions.

At the abbey gate, the King, apparently believing that Quélus, Mangiron, Schomberg, and D'Épernon were in as much need of rest as Livarot, Ribeirac, and Antraguët, dismissed them also.

The archbishop, who had been officiating since morning, and

who, as well as the other priests, had not broken his fast during the day, was sinking from fatigue; the King took pity on the holy martyrs and allowed them to depart.

Then turning to the prior, Joseph Foulon :

“Holy father,” said he, in his most nasal tones, “I have come to seek repose in your secluded retreat, sinner though I am.”

The prior inclined.

Then addressing those who, notwithstanding the discomforts of the journey, had followed him even to the end.

“Thank you, gentlemen,” said he; “go in peace.”

Each saluted respectfully, and the royal penitent, beating his breast, slowly mounted the steps of the abbey.

He had scarcely passed the threshold when the gate was closed behind him.

So absorbed was the King in his devotions that, apparently, he did not notice this circumstance, in which, after all, there was nothing extraordinary, as he had dismissed his entire suite.

“We will first conduct your Majesty to the crypt,” said the prior to the King, “which we have done our best to adorn in honor of the King of heaven and earth.”

Henri merely made a gesture of assent and walked behind the prior.

But as soon as he had passed through the gloomy arcade, lined on each side by two rows of monks as still as statues, as soon as he was seen to turn the corner that led to the chapel, twenty hoods were thrown back, and eyes could be discerned in the faint light that were aglow with joy and triumphant pride.

For a certainty, the countenances that were now revealed did not belong to idle, timid monks; the thick mustaches, the bronzed complexions, were in themselves suggestive of strength and activity.

Most of these faces were furrowed by scars, and close to one face that bore the noblest and most famous scar of all, appeared the exultant and impassioned face of a woman, who was also robed as a monk.

This woman shook a pair of golden scissors that hung by her side and cried :

“Ah, my brothers, we have the Valois at last.”

“Upon my word, I share your opinion, sister,” answered the Balafre.

"Not yet, not yet," murmured the cardinal.

"Why so?"

"Do you think our citizen militia is numerous enough to withstand Crillon and his guards?"

"We have something better than that," replied the Duc de Mayenne, "and, believe me, there will not be a single musket-shot exchanged."

"Eh?" said the Duchesse de Montpensier; "you're not serious, I hope? I should enjoy a little skirmish so much!"

"I'm heartily sorry, sister, but you'll have to get along without it. When the King is taken, he will cry out; but there will be none to answer his cries. We shall then, by persuasion or force, but without appearing in the matter, get him to sign his abdication. The news of the abdication will run like wildfire through the city, and all, soldiers as well as citizens, will be in our favor."

"The plan is good, and cannot fail now," said the duchess.

"It is somewhat rough, though," observed the Cardinal de Guise, shaking his head.

"The King will refuse to sign the abdication," added the Balafré; "he is brave, and will prefer death."

"Then let him die!" cried Mayenne and the duchess.

"No," answered the Duc de Guise, firmly, "no! I am perfectly willing to succeed a prince who abdicates and who is despised; but I will not sit on the throne of a monarch who has been assassinated and is pitied. Besides, you leave out of your plans the Duc d'Anjou, who, if the King is killed, will claim the crown."

"Let him claim it, *mordieu!*" said Mayenne. "let him claim it. Our brother the cardinal has foreseen this contingency: the Duc d'Anjou shall be included in his brother's act of abdication. He has been intriguing with the Huguenots, and is unworthy to reign."

"With the Huguenots — are you sure of that?"

"Sure of it? Why, the King of Navarre helped him to escape!"

"There is something in that."

"Then another clause in favor of our house must follow the clause of the King's abdication; this clause shall make you lieutenant-general of the kingdom, brother, and from that to the throne is but a step."

"Yes, yes," said the cardinal. "I have arranged all that."

But it is possible that the French guards, to make sure that the abdication is genuine, and, above all, that it is voluntary, may force the gates of the abbey. Crillon is not a person to be trifled with; he is just the sort of man to say to the King: 'Sire, you must save your honor, though it be at the peril of your life.'"

"That is a matter for the consideration of the general," said Mayenne, "and the general has taken his precautions. If we are besieged, we have eighty gentlemen here, and I have distributed arms to a hundred monks. We could hold out for a month against a whole army, putting aside the fact that, if we could not, we can escape with our prisoner through the underground passage."

"I wonder what the Duc d'Anjou is doing at the present moment."

"In the hour of danger he has weakened, as usual. The duke returned to his hôtel, where he is doubtless waiting for the news along with Monsoreau and Bussy."

"By my soul, it is here he ought to have been, and not at his hôtel."

"I think you are mistaken, brother," replied the cardinal; "if we brought the two brothers together, the nobility and the people would suspect there was a plot to entrap the whole family, and we ought to do everything in our power to avoid the appearance of playing the part of usurper. We inherit, that is all. By leaving the Duc d'Anjou his freedom and the queen mother her independence, we gain the good wishes and the admiration of our partisans, and no one will have anything to say against us. If we act differently, we shall have Bussy and a hundred other dangerous swords against us."

"Pshaw! Bussy is to fight against the minions to-morrow."

"I know he is, and he is sure to kill them, too," said the Duc de Guise; "and, when he has done so, he will belong to us. I should like to make him general of the army in Italy, where war must soon break out. A very superior man is the Seigneur de Bussy, and I have the highest esteem for him."

"And to show that I have quite as much esteem for him as you have, brother," said the Duchesse de Montpensier, "I intend marrying him, if I become a widow."

"Marry him, sister!" cried Mayenne.

"Oh," said the duchess, "greater ladies than I am have

done more than that for him, and he was not then the general of an army, either."

"Come, come," said Mayenne, "we have other things to do at present: let us set about doing them!"

"Who is with the King?" asked the Duc de Guise.

"The prior and Brother Gorenflot, I think," said the cardinal. "It is best he should see only familiar faces for a time. Otherwise, he might take alarm at once."

"Yes," said Mayenne; "besides, it will be pleasanter for us to eat the fruits of the conspiracy than to gather them ourselves."

"Is he in his cell yet?" asked Madame de Montpensier, who was impatient to give the King the third crown she had been so long promising him.

"No, not yet; he is going to see first the great *reposoir* in the crypt and to venerate the holy relics."

"And then?"

"Then the prior will address to him a few high-sounding phrases on the vanity of all earthly things; after which, Brother Gorenflot, — you know him, the monk that delivered that magnificent discourse on the evening of the League" —

"Yes; go on."

"Brother Gorenflot will try to obtain by persuasion that which we are reluctant to wrest from his weakness."

"It would be infinitely better if we succeeded in doing so," said the duke, thoughtfully.

"No doubt of our success," Mayenne answered; "Henri is superstitious and weak-minded. I am quite certain he will yield to the fear of hell."

"Well, I am not at all so certain as you are," said the duke, "but our vessels are burned behind us; there is no going back. So if both Gorenflot's and the prior's efforts fail, we must have recourse to the last resort — intimidation."

"And then I shall clip my Valois," cried the duchess, still reverting to her favorite idea.

At this moment the tinkling of a bell sounded under the vaults, which were darkened by the shades of approaching night.

"The King is descending to the crypt," said the Duc de Guise; "call your friends, Mayenne, and let us all become monks again."

And immediately these bold faces and ardent eyes and tale-

telling wounds were buried in the folds of monastic hoods : then thirty or forty monks, led by the three brothers, made their way to the entrance of the crypt.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

CHICOT I.

THE King was so entirely absorbed in his pious meditations that it looked as if the schemes of the Guises could be carried to a successful issue with the greatest ease.

He visited the crypt in company with all the monks, kissed the shrine, and repeated the most lugubrious of the psalms, all the time beating his breast with increasing energy.

Then the prior began his exhortation, to which the King listened with the same marks of fervent contrition.

At length, in obedience to a gesture of the Duc de Guise, Joseph Foulon, with a profound salutation, said to Henri :

"Sire, will it please you now to come and lay your earthly crown at the feet of the eternal King?"

"Let us go," said the King, simply.

And, escorted by the whole community, he proceeded toward the cells opening on the corridor on the left, which could be dimly discerned from the crypt.

Henri was apparently deeply affected. He never ceased beating his breast, and the big rosary, which he quickly turned in his hands at the same time, rang on the chaplet of ivory deaths' heads that was suspended from his belt.

At length he reached the cell; on the threshold stood Gorenflot, his face all in a glow and his eyes sparkling like carbuncles.

"Here?" inquired the King.

"Right here," answered the fat monk.

The King might be excused for a little hesitation, because at the end of the corridor he saw a door, or rather a mysterious-looking grating that opened on a steep slope which was plunged in darkness.

Henri entered the cell.

"*Hic portus salutis;*" he murmured, in tones of emotion.

"Yes, indeed," answered Foulon, "*this is a harbor of safety.*"

"Leave us now," said Gorenflot with a majestic gesture.

And immediately the door was shut, and the others departed.

The King, noticing a stool at the back of the cell, sat down and placed his hands on his knees.

"Ah! so here you are, then, Herod; here you are, you pagan, you Nebuchadnezzar," said Gorenflot, abruptly, planting his thick hands on his hips.

The King appeared astonished.

"Is it to me you are speaking, brother?" said he.

"Yes, it is to you I am speaking — and to whom do I speak? Do I not speak to a wretch to whom any epithet, however vile, can be applied with perfect truth?"

"My brother," murmured the King.

"Bah! you have no brother here. I have long been thinking out a sermon, and now you shall have it — I divide it into three parts, as every good preacher should do. In the first place, you are a tyrant; in the second, a satyr; and lastly, you are dethroned."

"Dethroned, brother?" violently cried the King, who was invisible in the darkness.

"Neither more nor less. This abbey is not like Poland; no chance of taking yourself off here."

"Then I have been entrapped."

"Learn, O Valois, that a King is but a man, even when he happen to be a man."

"This is violence, brother!"

"To be sure it is; do you imagine we imprisoned you in order to bow and scrape to you?"

"You violate the spirit of your holy religion, brother."

"Is there any holy religion?" cried Gorenflot.

"Oh!" exclaimed the King, "a saint to utter such horrors!"

"So much the worse, I have said them."

"You expose yourself to damnation."

"Is there any damnation?"

"You talk like an unbeliever, brother."

"Stop that, I say; I don't want any of your preaching. Are you ready, Valois?"

"To do what?"

"To resign your crown. I have been asked to invite you to do so; therefore, I invite you."

"But you are committing a mortal sin."

"Oho! am I?" said Gorenflot, with a cynical smile. "Well, I am empowered to grant absolution, and I absolve myself in advance. Come now, Brother Valois, do you renounce?"

"What?"

"The throne of France."

"Sooner death!"

"Eh? Well, then, you'll die. Hold on! here's the prior coming back. Decide!"

"I have my guards, my friends; I shall be able to defend myself."

"Possibly; but we intend killing you first."

"Give me, at least, a moment for reflection."

"Not an instant, not a second."

"Your zeal gets the better of you, brother," said the prior. And he made a sign to the King with his hand which meant:

"Sire, your request is granted."

And the prior again closed the door.

Henri fell into a profound revery.

"Very well," said he, after reflecting for about ten minutes, "I accept the sacrifice."

No sooner were the words spoken than there was a knock at the door.

"It is done," said Gorenflot; "he accepts."

The King heard something like a murmur of mingled joy and surprise outside in the corridor.

"Read him the act," said a voice which produced such a startling effect on the King that he looked out through a grating of the door. A roll of parchment passed from the hand of a monk into that of Gorenflot.

Gorenflot read the act to the King with a good deal of difficulty. Henri was very dejected and buried his face in his hands.

"And if I refuse to sign?" he cried, the tears starting from his eyes.

"It will be doubly your ruin," answered the Duc de Guise, in a voice muffled by his cowl. "Consider yourself as dead to the world, and do not force your subjects to shed the blood of him who was once their King."

"I will not be compelled," said Henri.

"It is what I anticipated," whispered the duke to his sister, who had a sinister gleam in her eyes.

"Go, brother," he added, addressing Mayenne, "see that every one is armed and that all preparations are made."

"For what?" asked the King, plaintively.

"For everything," said the prior.

The King grew more despairing than ever.

"*Corbleu!*" cried Gorenflot, "I hated thee, Valois, but now my scorn is stronger than my hate. Sign, sign, or by this hand alone shalt thou perish."

"Have patience, patience," said the King; "let me pray to the Sovereign Master of us all for resignation."

"He would reflect a second time!" cried Gorenflot.

"Give him till midnight," said the cardinal.

"Thanks, charitable Christian," exclaimed the King, in a paroxysm of despair. "May God reward you!"

"His brain has really become enfeebled," murmured the Duc de Guise; "we serve France by dethroning him."

"No matter," said the duchess; "feeble or not feeble, I'll have the pleasure of clipping him."

During this dialogue, Gorenflot, with folded arms, was overwhelming Henri with the most violent insults and reminding him of all the foul sins of his scandalous life.

Suddenly a dull noise was heard outside the convent.

"Silence!" cried the voice of the Duc de Guise.

There was the deepest silence in an instant. Presently it became possible to distinguish blows, struck forcibly and at regular intervals on the resounding gates of the abbey.

Mayenne came running up as fast as his obesity allowed him.

"Brothers," said he, "there is a troop of armed men in front of the portal."

"They have come for him," said the duchess.

"The more reason why he should be made to sign quick," said the cardinal.

"Sign, Valois, sign!" cried Gorenflot, in a voice of thunder.

"You gave me till midnight," said the King, piteously.

"Ah! you are changing your mind, are you? You expect aid" —

"Undoubtedly, I do. I still have a chance."

"To die, if he does not sign at once," answered the shrill, imperious voice of the duchess.

Gorenflot seized the King's wrist and handed him a pen.

The noise outside increased.

"Another troop!" shouted a monk, who came running up the corridor; "it has surrounded the court on the left."

"Sign!" cried Mayenne and the duchess, impatiently.

The King dipped his pen in the ink-bottle.

"The Swiss!" Foulon hurried in to say; "they have seized the cemetery on the right, and the entire abbey is now invested."

"Well, we will defend ourselves," answered Mayenne, resolutely.

"With such a hostage in our hands, we need not surrender at discretion."

"He has signed!" roared Gorenflot, tearing the parchment from the hand of Henri, who, utterly depressed, buried his head in his hood, and his hood in his arms.

"Then you are king," said the cardinal to the duke. "Take the precious document and hide it quickly."

The King, in the extravagance of his grief, overturned the little lamp that alone shed a light on the scene; but the duke already held the parchment.

"What shall we do! what shall we do!" asked a monk whose robe covered a gentleman armed from top to toe. "Crillon is here with the French guards and threatens to break open the doors. Listen."

"In the King's name!" cried the powerful voice of Crillon.

"What nonsense! there is no longer a king," Gorenflot shouted back through a window.

"Who is the ruffian that says so?" answered Crillon.

"I! I! I!" replied Gorenflot from the darkness, in the most arrogant and provoking tone of voice imaginable.

"Some one point out the scoundrel to me, so that I can have half a dozen bullets planted in his belly," said Crillon.

And Gorenflot, seeing the guards level their weapons, dropped down and fell on his back in the middle of the cell.

"Break open the door, M. Crillon," said, amid general silence, a voice that raised the hair on the head of all the monks, real or pretended, that were in the corridor.

The voice came from a man who issued forth from the ranks of the soldiers and marched up to the steps of the main entrance to the abbey.

"Yes, sire," answered Crillon, giving a tremendous blow on the door with an axe.

It shook the very walls.

"What do you want?" said the prior, appearing at a window, and trembling with terror.

"Ah, it is you, M. Foulon," replied the same calm and haughty voice. "I want my jester, who went to spend the night in one of your cells. I am at a loss for Chicot. Without him I feel quite bored in the Louvre."

"And I'm not bored at all, I never had such fun in my life, my son," answered Chicot, getting rid of his hood and pushing through the throng of monks, who recoiled with howls of terror.

At this moment the Duc de Guise had a lamp brought to him and read at the bottom of the act the signature, still fresh, that had been obtained with so much difficulty:

"Chicot I."

"Chicot I," he cried; "a thousand devils!"

"Well," said the cardinal, "we are ruined; let us fly."

"Ah! bah!" cried Chicot to Gorenflot, who was almost in a swoon, as he lashed him with the cord he had worn round his robe, "ah! bah!"

CHAPTER XC.

PRINCIPAL AND INTEREST.

As the King spoke and the conspirators recognized him, their stupefaction gave place to dismay.

The abdication signed "Chicot I." changed their dismay to fury.

Chicot threw away his frock from his shoulders, crossed his arms, and, while Gorenflot was taking to his heels, sustained the first shock, smiling and impassive.

But he passed through an awful moment.

The gentlemen, quivering with rage, advanced on the Gascon, determined to avenge the cruel mystification of which they had been the victims.

But this man with no other weapons than the two arms that covered his breast, this man with the smiling lips that seemed to defy so much strength to attack so much weakness, had, perhaps, more effect in arresting their progress than even the cardinal, who uttered strong remonstrances, and pointed out

that the death of Chicot would serve no end, but, on the contrary, would be terribly avenged by the King, his jester's accomplice in the scene of appalling buffoonery.

The result was that daggers and rapiers were lowered before Chicot, who, whether from a spirit of self-sacrifice, and he was capable of it, or from his ability to discern their thoughts, continued to laugh in their faces.

Meanwhile, the King's threats and Crillon's blows became more violent.

It was evident the door could not long resist an attack, which they did not even think of repelling.

So, after a moment's deliberation, the Duc de Guise gave the order to retreat.

This order brought a mocking smile to Chicot's lips.

During the nights he had spent with Gorenflot, he had examined the underground passage, had examined the door at the outlet and brought it to the notice of the King, who had stationed there Tocquenot, lieutenant of the Swiss guards.

It was, therefore, evident that the Leaguers would be trapped, one after the other.

The cardinal was the first to steal away, followed by fifty gentlemen.

Then Chicot saw the duke pass with about the same number of monks; next followed Mayenne, whose preposterous stomach and general pursiness were obstacles to anything like activity; he was naturally, then, entrusted with the defence of the rear.

When he dragged his lumpish, unwieldy body past Gorenflot's cell, the jester did more than laugh, he held both his sides; he was, literally, convulsed.

Ten minutes slipped by; Chicot listened eagerly, thinking every moment he could hear the noise of the Leaguers being driven back into the tunnel; but, instead of that, the noise made by them, was, to his amazement, gradually dying away.

Suddenly a thought flashed through the Gascon's mind, and instead of roaring with laughter, he gnashed his teeth with rage.

A considerable time had now elapsed and the Leaguers did not return. Had they perceived that the door was guarded, and discovered another outlet?

Chicot was rushing out of his cell, when, all at once, he found the door obstructed by a shapeless mass that rolled at his feet and tore the hair of its head out by fistfuls.

"Ah! wretch that I am!" cried Gorenflot. "Oh! my dear M. Chicot, forgive me! forgive me!"

How was it that the monk, who had been the first to fly, was here alone when he ought to have been so far away?

This was the question that quite reasonably occurred to the mind of Chicot.

"Oh, my good M. Chicot, my dear master, help! help!" Gorenflot howled; "pardon your unworthy friend, who repents and does penance even at your very knees."

"But," inquired Chicot, "how is it you did not manage to escape with the other rascals?"

"Because I could not go where the others went; because the Lord in his anger made me pot-bellied. Oh! miserable paunch! Oh! most luckless of stomachs!" cried Gorenflot, striking with both his clenched hands the article thus apostrophized. "Oh! why am I not slim and genteel like you, M. Chicot! What a beautiful thing, and, oh! above all, what a lucky thing it is to be slim!"

Chicot was absolutely a stranger to the cause of Gorenflot's lamentations.

"Then the others are getting through, somewhere or other? The others are escaping?" he cried, in a voice of thunder.

"Well, of course they are! What would you have them do? Wait to be hanged? Oh, my unfortunate belly!"

"Silence!" cried Chicot, "and answer."

Gorenflot raised himself on his knees.

"Question me, M. Chicot," he said, "you have certainly the right to do so."

"How are the others escaping?"

"As fast as their legs can carry them."

"I understand; but in what direction?"

"Through the air-hole?"

"*Mordieu!* what air-hole?"

"The air-hole opening into the burial vault in the cemetery."

"Do you enter it by the tunnel which you call the underground passage?"

"No, dear M. Chicot. The door of the underground passage was guarded on the outside. Just as the great Cardinal de Guise was going to open it, he heard a Swiss saying: '*Mich durstet*,' which means, it would seem, '*I am thirsty*.'"

"*Ventre de biche!*" exclaimed Chicot, "I know what this means, too; so the fugitives took another road?"

"Yes, dear M. Chicot, they are escaping by the vault in the cemetery."

"What does it open into?"

"On one side, into the crypt; on the other, it runs under the Porte Saint-Jacques."

"You lie."

"I, my dear protector!"

"If they had escaped by the vault that opens into the crypt, they must have passed by your cell, and I should have seen them."

"Perfectly correct, dear M. Chicot. But they thought there was no time for such a roundabout journey, and so they are passing out through the air-hole."

"What air-hole?"

"An air-hole opening into the garden and giving some light to the passage."

"So that you"—

"So that, as I am too fat"—

"Well?"

"I could n't get through, and they pulled me back by the legs, because I was in the way of the others."

"But," cried Chicot, his face lighting up with strange and joyous elation, "if you could not get through"—

"I could n't, and yet I did my best. But look at my shoulders, look at my chest."

"Then as he is stouter than you"—

"Who is he?"

"God of heaven!" said Chicot, "if thou dost favor my cause, and he be unable to pass through, I promise thee the largest candle ever made!"

"M. Chicot."

"Get up, you knave."

The monk rose up as fast as he was able.

"Now bring me at once to the air-hole."

"Wherever you wish, my dear friend."

"Walk in front, you rascal, in front."

Gorenflot trotted on as quickly as he could, now and then raising his arms to heaven in protest, for Chicot was stimulating his celerity by frequent applications of the cord he held in his hand.

Both followed the corridor and descended into the garden.

"This way," said Gorenflot, "this way."

"Say nothing, but go on, you varlet."

With a last vigorous effort, the monk reached a clump of trees from the depths of which groans seemed to issue.

"There," said he, "there."

And entirely out of breath, he fell back on the grass.

Chicot advanced three steps and perceived something in motion a little above the ground.

Beside this something, which resembled the hind quarters of the animal styled by Diogenes "a featherless cock with only two feet," lay a sword and monk's robe.

It was evident that the individual who found himself caught in this unfortunate pass had doffed in succession all the objects that could increase his rotundity; so that, being for the nonce deprived of his sword and divested of his frock, he might be said to have been reduced to his simplest expression.

And yet, like Gorenflot, he made useless efforts to disappear completely.

"*Mordieu! ventre bleu! sang dieu!*" the fugitive cried, in a choking voice. "I would rather pass through the midst of the entire guards. A-a-a-h! do not pull so hard, my friends; I shall slip through gradually. I feel I'm advancing — not quickly, but advancing all the same."

"*Ventre de biche! M. de Mayenne!*" murmured Chicot, in ecstacy. "O good and gracious Lord, thou hast won thy candle!"

"I haven't been surnamed Hercule for nothing," continued Mayenne, in the same stifled voice. "I'll raise this stone. Ugh!"

And the effort he made was so violent that the stone really trembled.

"Wait," said Chicot, in an undertone, and he tramped on the ground like a person who was running up and making a great noise.

"They are coming," said several voices from the inside.

"Ah!" cried Chicot, as if he were only just arrived and out of breath.

"Ah! it is you, you abominable monk!"

"Say nothing, monseigneur," murmured several voices, "he takes you for Gorenflot."

"Ah! it's you, at last! you lump of obesity, *pondus immobile*, take that! and that! and that! Aha! so it's really you, *indigesta moles*, take that again, I say, and that!"

And at each apostrophe, Chicot, whose long unslaked thirst for vengeance was now to be amply gratified, lashed repeatedly all the fleshy parts of his victim that were exposed, with the same cord with which he had already flagellated Gorenflot.

"Silence!" the same voices could be heard whispering, "he takes you for the monk."

And, in fact, Mayenne uttered only a few repressed groans, while making increased efforts to raise the stone.

"Ah, conspirator!" Chicot went on again; "ah, unworthy monk! take this, it is for drunkenness; and this, it is for anger; and this, it is for gluttony; and this, it is for sloth. I regret there are only seven deadly sins. Hold on there! hold on! these are for all the other vices you have."

"M. Chicot!" cried Gorenflot, covered with perspiration; "M. Chicot, have mercy on me."

"Ha! traitor!" continued Chicot, plying the cord faster than ever, "do you feel them? these are for your treason."

"Mercy! mercy!" murmured Gorenflot, who really was under the impression that the strokes were falling on himself and not on Mayenne, "mercy! dear M. Chicot."

But Chicot, instead of stopping, became actually drunk with the spirit of revenge and redoubled his blows.

Mayenne was a man of powerful self-control, but he could no longer refrain from groaning aloud.

"Ah!" Chicot resumed. "Why did it not please God to substitute for thy base-born body, for thy plebeian carcass, the most high and most puissant shoulders of the Duc de Mayenne, to whom I owe ever so many cudgel strokes, for the interest has been accumulating for seven years! Meanwhile, take that, and that, and that."

Gorenflot heaved a sigh and again fell flat on his back.

"Chicot!" shouted the duke.

"Yes, Chicot, I am Chicot; yes, an unworthy servant of the King; Chicot, who has but two weak arms, but would wish he had the hundred arms of Briareus on such a grand occasion."

And Chicot, growing more frenzied every moment, used the cord with such savage violence that the sufferer, collecting all his strength, and stimulated to a tremendous effort by his very agony, lifted the stone, and fell mangled and bleeding into the arms of his friends.

Chicot's last blow struck the empty air.

Then he turned round. The real Gorenflot was in a swoon, the effect of terror, not of pain.

CHAPTER XCI.

WHAT HAPPENED NEAR THE BASTILE WHILE CHICOT WAS
PAYING HIS DEBTS IN THE ABBEY OF SAINTE GENEVIÈVE.

It was eleven at night; the Duc d'Anjou, in consequence of the weakness that had seized him in the Rue Saint-Jacques, had retired to his cabinet and was anxiously waiting for a messenger from the Duc de Guise announcing the abdication of the King.

He was walking restlessly backward and forward, going from the door to the window, then entering the antechamber and looking out through the windows there, then turning his eyes on the great clock, the seconds of which made a dismal tinkling in their sheath of gilded wood.

Suddenly he heard a horse pawing the ground in the courtyard; he thought this horse might be that of the messenger, and ran out to the balcony; but the horse he saw was held in check by a groom, who was evidently waiting for his master.

The master soon appeared, coming out from one of the inner apartments; it was Bussy, who, as captain of the prince's guards, had returned to give the password for the night before keeping his appointment.

The duke, on seeing this brave and handsome young man, with whom he had never had any reason to find fault, felt a touch of remorse; but when Bussy came close to a lighted torch held by one of his servants and François perceived that his face was radiant with joy, hope, and happiness, his jealousy revived in all its strength.

Meanwhile, Bussy, ignorant that the duke was watching intently every emotion betrayed by his changing features, after giving the password, wrapped his cloak about his shoulders, leaped into the saddle, clapped spurs to his steed and swept along under the vault, which echoed loudly to his horse's hoofs.

For a moment the prince, uneasy at seeing that the messenger did not arrive, again entertained the idea of sending for him, for he suspected that Bussy, before going in the direction of the Bastile, would stop at his hôtel; but then he had a vision of the young man laughing with Diane over his disappointed love, putting him, the Duc d'Anjou, on a level

with the despised husband, and again his evil instincts got the better of his good ones.

Happiness had lit up Bussy's face with a smile as he was departing; this smile was an insult in the eyes of the prince; he let him go; if he had looked sad and gloomy, he would, perhaps, have retained him.

However, as soon as Bussy was outside the precincts of the Hôtel d'Anjou he slackened his thunderous pace, as if he feared the noise he himself had made. He passed into his hôtel, as the duke had anticipated, and gave his horse over to a groom, who was listening with great respect to a veterinary lecture by Rémy.

"Ah!" said Bussy, recognizing the young doctor; "so it's you, Rémy?"

"Yes, monseigneur, myself in person."

"And not yet gone to bed?"

"It wants ten minutes of my time for going. I have only just come in, monseigneur. In fact, since I have my patient no longer, the days seem to me to have forty-eight hours."

"There's nothing preying on your mind, I hope?"

"I'm afraid there is."

"Is it love?"

"Ah, how often have I told you I have no faith in love, and I use it in general only as material for scientific study."

"Then Gertrude is forsaken?"

"Entirely."

"So you have grown tired?"

"Of being beaten — for that was the direction in which the love of my Amazon had its most significant manifestations — yes, though she is an excellent girl, as girls go."

"And your heart says nothing to you in her favor to-night?"

"Why to-night, monseigneur?"

"Because I would have taken you with me

"To the Bastille quarter?"

"Yes."

"Then you're going there?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And Monsoreau?"

"At Compiègne, my dear, getting up a hunt for his Majesty."

"Are you sure, monseigneur?"

"He was ordered to do so publicly this morning."

"Ah!"

Rémy remained thoughtful a moment.

"Then?" he asked, after a pause.

"Then I spent the day in thanking God for the happiness he has sent me for to-night, and I intend to spend the night in the enjoyment of that happiness."

"Very well; Jourdain, my sword," said Rémy.

The groom went immediately into the house.

"You have changed your mind, then?" asked Bussy.

"In what respect?"

"Why, you have sent for your sword."

"Yes, I will go with you as far as the door for two reasons."

"What are they?"

"The first is because I fear you may encounter enemies in the streets."

Bussy smiled.

"Oh, yes, laugh away, monseigneur. I know you are n't afraid of enemies, and, in any case, Doctor Rémy would n't be much of an ally. Still, two men are not so much exposed to attack as one. My second reason is that I have a lot of good advice to give you."

"Come along, then, my dear Rémy, come along. We will speak of her; next to the pleasure of seeing the woman you love, I know none greater than that of talking about her."

"There are some people even," replied Rémy, "who find a pleasure in talking about her before seeing her."

"By the way, it strikes me," said Bussy, "that the weather is very uncertain."

"Yes, the sky has been at one time cloudy, at another clear. So much the better; I like it so. I'm rather fond of variety. Thanks, Jourdain," he added, addressing the groom who brought him his rapier.

Then turning to the count:

"Now I am at your orders, monseigneur," said he; "let us start."

Bussy took the young doctor's arm, and they both set out for the Bastile.

Rémy had said to the count that he intended giving him a great deal of good advice, and, as soon as they were outside the hôtel, the doctor began to keep his promise. He made use of a number of Latin quotations to prove that Bussy did

wrong to visit Diane that night, instead of remaining quietly in bed, for a man usually fights badly if he has slept badly. Then he passed from the weighty maxims of the faculty to the myths of fable and tried to convince him that it was generally Venus who disarmed Mars.

Bussy smiled; Rémy insisted.

"You see, Rémy," said the count, "when my arm holds a sword, it becomes so assimilated to the latter that the fibres of the flesh take on the hardness and suppleness of steel, while the steel appears to grow warm and animated like living flesh. From that moment my sword is an arm, and my arm a sword. From that moment — you understand me? — strength and energy have really nothing to do in the matter. A sword never grows tired."

"But it sometimes gets blunt."

"Fear nothing."

"Ah, my dear monseigneur," continued Rémy, "the combat in which you engage to-morrow will be like that in which Hercules fought against Antaeus, Theseus against the Minotaur; it will be like that of the Thirty, like that of Bayard — it will be something Homeric, gigantic, impossible. I would have men speak of it in future times as the combat of Bussy, the combat without a parallel; and, as for yourself, it would disappoint me if you received even a scratch."

"Rest easy, my dear Rémy, you shall see wonders. This morning I fenced with four old fire-eaters, who, during eight minutes, were never able to touch me once, while I slashed their doublets to pieces. I bounded like a tiger."

"I do not contradict you, my dear master; but are you sure your legs will be as strong to-morrow as they are to-day?"

Here Bussy and the doctor began talking in Latin, their dialogue being interrupted by frequent bursts of laughter.

At last they arrived at the end of the Rue Saint-Antoine.

"Adieu," said Bussy, "we are at the place."

"What if I were to wait for you?" said Rémy.

"Why should you do so?"

"To make sure that you're home before two o'clock, and have, at least, five or six hours' sound sleep before the duel."

"If I pledge you my word?"

"Oh, that is all I want — Bussy's word! Hang it! things would be at a pretty pass if I were not satisfied with the word of Bussy."

"Well, you have it. In two hours, Rémy, I will be in the hôtel."

"Then adieu, monseigneur."

"Adieu, Rémy."

The young men parted, but Rémy did not go far from where he had been standing.

Rémy watched the count as he advanced toward the house, and, as the absence of Monsoreau made everything secure, he saw him enter, not this time by the window, but through the door, which Gertrude opened for him.

Then he turned back and quietly proceeded through the deserted streets on his way to the Hôtel de Bussy.

As he was passing out of the Place Beaudoyer he noticed five men approaching him, all muffled up in cloaks, and apparently perfectly armed.

For five men to be out at this hour was rather singular. He hid behind a corner of a house that was set back considerably from the street.

When they were within ten yards of him, they halted, and, after a cordial good night, four of them went in different directions, while the fifth remained where he was, apparently considering what he should do.

After a moment or so, the moon issued forth from a cloud and its beams fell upon the face of this night-walker.

"M. de Saint-Luc!" cried Rémy.

Saint-Luc raised his head when he heard his name, and saw a man running up to him.

"Rémy!" he cried, in his turn.

"Rémy himself, but I am happy not to be able to say, at your service: for you seem to be in the very best of health. Would it be indiscreet to ask you, monseigneur, what are you doing so far away from the Louvre?"

"Faith, not at all, my dear fellow. By order of the King I am examining the physiognomy of the city. He said to me: 'Saint-Luc, take a stroll through the streets of Paris, and if you hear any one say I have abdicated, contradict it boldly!'"

"And have you heard anything?"

"Not a whisper. Now, as it is near midnight, as everything is quiet, and as I met nobody but M. de Monsoreau, I have dismissed my friends, and was thinking of returning when you saw me."

"What is that you say? M. de Monsoreau!"

"Yes."

"You met M. de Monsoreau?"

"With a band of armed men, ten or twelve, at the very least."

"M. de Monsoreau! Impossible."

"Why impossible?"

"Because he ought to be at Compiègne."

"He ought to be, but he is not."

"But the King's order?"

"Pshaw! who obeys the King's orders?"

"You met M. de Monsoreau with ten or twelve men?"

"Certainly."

"And you recognized him?"

"I think so."

"You were only five?"

"My four friends and myself, not a soul more."

"And he did not attack you?"

"He avoided me, on the contrary, and this astonished me exceedingly. When I recognized him, I expected there would be a terrible battle."

"In what direction was he going?"

"In the direction of the Rue de la Tixeranderie."

"Ah! my God!" cried Rémy.

"What?" asked Saint-Luc, frightened by the tone in which the young man spoke.

"M. de Saint-Luc, a great misfortune is about to happen."

"A great misfortune! To whom?"

"To M. de Bussy."

"To Bussy. *Mordieu!* speak out, Rémy. I am his friend, as you know."

"What a misfortune! M. de Bussy believed him at Compiègne."

"Well?"

"Well! he decided to take advantage of his absence."

"So that he is" —

"With Madame Diane."

"Ah!" murmured Saint-Luc, "this is sure to cause trouble."

"Yes. You understand, don't you?" said Rémy. "He had suspicions, either originating with himself or suggested by others, and he pretended to leave Paris, so that he might appear unexpectedly at his home."

"Hold on for a moment," said Saint-Luc, striking his forehead.

"Have you any idea on the subject?" asked Rémy.

"The Duke d'Anjou is at the bottom of all this."

"But it was the Duc d'Anjou who brought about Monsoreau's departure this morning."

"That only strengthens my conviction. Have you good lungs, Rémy?"

"*Corbleu!* They're like a blacksmith's bellows."

"Then let us run without losing a moment. You know the house?"

"Yes."

"Go before me, then."

And the two young men started through the streets at a gait that would have done honor to hunted stags.

"Is he much in advance of us?" asked Rémy, without pausing.

"Who? Monsoreau?"

"Yes."

"Nearly a quarter of an hour," said Saint-Luc, clearing a pile of stones five feet high.

"Oh! if we should only arrive in time!" said Rémy, drawing his sword, so as to be prepared for every event.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE ASSASSINATION.

Bussy felt neither doubtful nor uneasy, and Diane received him without fear, for she was sure of her husband's absence.

Never had the beautiful young woman been so joyous; never had she been so happy. There are certain moments in our lives — moments whose significance is revealed to us by our souls, or rather by the instinct of self-preservation within us — when a man unites his moral faculties with all the physical resources supplied by his senses; he at once concentrates and multiplies his energies, and absorbs life through every pore; life which he may lose at any moment, unconscious of the catastrophe that will force him to relinquish it.

Yet Diane was moved, and moved the more deeply because

she tried to hide her emotion, and, being thus moved by the dread of a threatening morrow, she seemed more tender than usual, for sadness must be an element in all true love, giving to it that perfume of poesy it would otherwise lack; true passion is never light-hearted, and the eyes of the woman that sincerely loves will be oftener moist with tears than sparkling with mirth.

So she began by arresting the amorous advances of the young man; what she had to tell him to-night was that his life was her life; what she had to discuss with him was the surest way to escape.

To conquer was not everything; after conquering, he must flee the wrath of the King; for, in all probability, never would Henri pardon the defeat or death of his favorites.

“And besides,” said Diane, with her arm round her lover’s neck, and her eyes passionately riveted on his, “are you not the paladin of France? Why make it a point of honor to augment your glory? You tower so high above other men that it would be almost ungenerous in you to seek to rise higher. You would not care to please other women, for you love me and would dread to lose me, would you not, my Louis? Louis, defend your life. I do not say: ‘Beware of death!’ for I do not think there exists in the whole world a man strong enough, a man powerful enough to kill my Louis, except by treachery; but beware of wounds. You may be wounded, as you well know, since it was through a wound received in fighting these same men that I first made your acquaintance.”

“Do not be uneasy,” answered Bussy, laughing; “I will take care of my face, anyway; I should not like to be disfigured.”

“Oh, take care of your entire person! Let it be as sacred to you, my Bussy, as if it were mine. Think what your agony should be if you saw me return wounded and bleeding. Well, the agony that you would feel would be mine if I saw your blood. Be prudent, my too courageous lion, that is all I ask. Do as did the Roman whose history you read me the other day, to reassure me. Oh! imitate him well; let your three friends fight, and aid the one of the three who is in the most danger; but if two, if three men attack you at once, fly; you can turn back, like Horatius, and when they are separated, kill them one after another.”

“Yes, my darling,” answered Bussy.

“ Oh, you answer without listening, Louis; you look at me, and do not hear me.”

“ Yes, but I see you, and you are very beautiful ! ”

“ My God ! Louis, it is not my beauty that is in question now, but your life, your life, my life — Stay, what I am about to tell you is frightful, but I want you to know it — not that it will render you more valiant, but it may render you more prudent — Well ! I shall have the courage to witness the duel ! ”

“ You ! ”

“ Yes, I intend to be present.”

“ You present ? Oh, impossible, Diane ! ”

“ No ! Listen : there is in the apartment next to this, as you know, a window that looks into a little court, and gives a side view of the paddock at Les Tournelles.”

“ Yes, I recollect, the window is about twenty feet from the ground ; there is an iron trellis below it, and the birds came the other day to pick up the crumbs I threw on it.”

“ Then you understand I shall be able to see you, Bussy ; therefore, be sure to stand so that I may have a good view of you. You will know I am there and can see me yourself. But no — I must be bereft of reason ! — no, do not look at me, your enemy might profit by the movement.”

“ And kill me ? — kill me while I had my eyes fixed on you. If death were my portion and I were allowed to choose the manner of it, no other death, Diane, would please me as well.”

“ Yes, but death is not your portion ; you are not to die, but to live, on the contrary.”

“ And I will live, do not be alarmed. Besides, I am well seconded ; you do not know my friends, but I know them. Anraguet is as much master of the sword as I am ; Ribeirac is so impassive on the ground that his eyes and arm alone seem alive, the former to affright his enemy, the latter to strike him. Livarot has the agility of a tiger. The victory will be easy, too easy, Diane. I should like if there were more danger, because then there would be more honor.”

“ Well, I believe you, my love, and I can smile because I can hope ; but listen and promise to obey me.”

“ Yes, if you do not bid me leave you.”

“ But that is what I am about to do ; I appeal to your reason.”

“ Then you should not have first deprived me of it.”



"YOU WILL GET ME KILLED, MADAME," SAID HE.

"None of your Italian *conceitti*, my fine gentleman, but obedience: love is proved by obedience."

"Well, give your orders."

"My darling, your eyes are heavy; you need a good night's rest; leave me."

"Oh! so soon!"

"I am going to say a prayer; then you may kiss me."

"It is to you that prayers ought to be offered, just as they are offered to the angels."

"And do you not believe that the angels pray to God?" said Diane, kneeling.

And from the depths of her heart, with an upturned gaze that seemed to penetrate the ceiling, and fly in search of God through the azure fields of heaven, she said:

"O Lord, if it be thy will that thy servant live happy and do not die of despair, protect him whom thou hast placed in my path, that I may love him and love him only."

When she had finished her prayer, Bussy stooped down to fold her in his arms and raise her lips to his. Suddenly a pane of glass was shattered into fragments, then the window itself, and three armed men appeared on the balcony, while a fourth climbed over the balustrade. The latter was masked and held in one hand a pistol, in the other a naked sword.

Bussy was for a moment riveted to the floor, paralyzed by the terrible shriek uttered by Diane as she flung herself on his neck.

The man in the mask made a sign, and his three companions advanced a step; one of the three was armed with an arquebuse.

Bussy put Diane aside with his left hand, and drew his sword with his right.

Then, falling back, he slowly lowered the weapon, never taking his eyes off his adversaries.

"On! my brave fellows, on!" cried a sepulchral voice from beneath what appeared to be a mask of velvet; "he is half dead; fear has killed him."

"You are mistaken," said Bussy; "I never fear."

Diane drew near him.

"Stand aside, Diane," he said, firmly.

But Diane, instead of obeying, again flung herself on his neck.

"You will get me killed, madame," said he.

Diane drew back, leaving him entirely uncovered.

She saw the only way to help her lover was to obey him implicitly and passively.

"Ah!" said the same hollow voice, "so it is really M. de Bussy. I would not believe it, simpleton that I am. What a friend, in good sooth, what a faithful, what an excellent friend!"

Bussy bit his lips and said nothing; but he looked round to see what means of defence were within his reach when the fighting should begin.

"He learns," continued the same voice, but with an accent of mockery that rendered its thrilling vibrations more terrible still, "he learns that the grand huntsman is absent, that he has left his wife alone, that this wife is alarmed by her loneliness, and so he comes to cheer her with his society — And when does he do this? Why, on the eve of a duel! What a kind and excellent friend is the Seigneur de Bussy!"

"Ah! it is you, M. de Monsoreau," said Bussy. "'Tis well. Fling away your mask. I know now with whom I have to deal."

"Yes, I will do so," answered the grand huntsman, and he threw off the black velvet mask.

Diane uttered a faint cry.

The count was as livid as a corpse; his smile was the smile of one of the damned.

"Oh, let us have done with this, monsieur," said Bussy: "I am not fond of such oratorical outbursts; it was all very well for the heroes of Homer, who were demigods, to talk before fighting; but I am a man; a man, however, who knows not fear: fight or let me pass."

The answer of Monsoreau was a hoarse, discordant laugh that made Diane shudder, but excited the most violent anger in Bussy.

"Stand out of my way! let me pass, I say!" repeated the young man, whose blood, for a moment driven back to his heart, now surged to his temples.

"Oh! — 'Let me pass!'" answered Monsoreau. "Would you please to repeat that again, M. de Bussy?"

"Then let us cross swords and make an end of the matter. I want to return home, and I live far from here."

During this time the heads of two more men rose above the bars of the balcony, and these two men, striding over the balustrade, went and placed themselves beside their comrades.

"Four and two make six," said Bussy; "where are the others?"

"They are waiting at the door," answered the grand huntsman.

Diane fell upon her knees, and, although she tried to keep back her sobs, Bussy heard them.

After a quick glance at her, he reflected for a moment, turned his eyes on the count, and said:

"My dear count, you know that I am a man of honor?"

"Yes," answered Monsoreau, "your honor is as stainless as the chastity of madame."

"Well, monsieur," said Bussy, with a slight shake of the head, "your words are bitter, but they are deserved, and all that must be settled for in good season. However, as I have an engagement to-morrow with four gentlemen whom you know, and as their claim on me is prior to yours, I ask your permission to be allowed to retire to-night, pledging you my word that you shall find me again, when and wherever you like."

Monsoreau shrugged his shoulders.

"Hear me," said Bussy; "I swear by the living God, monsieur, that when I have given satisfaction to Schonberg, D'Épéron, Quélus, and Maugiron, I shall be at your service, wholly and entirely at your service, and at yours alone. Should they kill me, your vengeance will be executed through their agency, and all will be over; should I be, on the other hand, in a condition to meet you"—

Monsoreau turned to his men.

"Forward, my brave fellows!" said he; "fall on him!"

"Ah!" cried Bussy. "I was mistaken; it is not a duel, it is an assassination."

"You think so, do you?" retorted Monsoreau.

"Yes, I see it now: we were each of us mistaken with regard to the other. But have a care, monsieur, the Duc d'Anjou will take offence at this."

"It is he who sends me," answered Monsoreau.

Bussy shuddered. Diane raised her hands to heaven, with a groan.

"In that case," said the young man, "my appeal is to Bussy alone. Look out for yourselves, cut-throats!"

And, with a turn of the hand, he upset the prie-Dieu, drew a table toward him and placed a chair on top of it, so that in

a second he had improvised a rampart between himself and his enemies.

His action had been so rapid that the bullet fired at him from an arquebuse struck only the prie-Dieu, into which it penetrated far; but, in the meantime, Bussy had thrown down a magnificent side-table of the time of François I. and added it to his defences.

Diane discovered that this last piece of furniture had been so placed as to hide her; she felt that only by her prayers could she aid Bussy, and she prayed. Bussy glanced at her, then at his assailants, then at his improvised rampart.

"Come on, now," he said; "but have a care, my sword stings."

The bravoës, urged onward by Monsoreau, advanced toward Bussy, who awaited them with body bent forward and flaming eyes. One of them attempted to sieze the prie-Dieu, but, before his hand had touched this part of the bulwark, the count's sword passed through an opening and ran through the small of his arm up to the shoulder. The man screamed and retreated to the window.

Bussy then heard rapid steps in the corridor, and believed he was caught between two fires.

He rushed to the door to shoot the bolts, but, before he reached it, it was opened.

He recoiled a step to put himself in an attitude to meet his new enemies as well as his old ones.

Two men rushed in through the door.

"Ah! dear master," cried one of them, "are we in time?"

"Rémy!" said the count.

"And I, too," cried another voice; "it would seem an assassination is taking place here!"

Bussy recognized the voice, and uttered a roar of joy.

"Saint-Luc!" he cried.

"Myself."

"Aha! my dear M. de Monsoreau," said Bussy, "I believe you had better let us pass now; for, if you do not step aside, we will pass over you."

"Three more men!" shouted Monsoreau.

And three new bravoës appeared above the balustrade.

"Why, they must have an entire army!" said Saint-Luc.

"Shield him, O Lord!" prayed Diane.

"Harlot!" cried Monsoreau, and he advanced to strike her.

Bussy saw the movement. Agile as a tiger, he bounded over his intrenchment; his sword met Monsoreau's, he made a quick lunge and touched his throat; but the distance was too great; the wound was only a scratch.

At the same time, five or six men rushed on Bussy.

One of these men fell under the sword of Saint-Luc.

"Forward!" cried Rémy.

"No, no, not forward," said Bussy: "on the contrary, Rémy, carry away Diane."

Monsoreau uttered a yell, and snatched a sword from one of the newcomers.

Rémy hesitated.

"But you?" he asked.

"Take her away! take her away!" cried Bussy. "I confide her to your care."

"O God! O God!" murmured Diane, "aid him!"

"Come, madame," said Rémy.

"Never! never! I will never leave him!"

Rémy seized her in his arms.

"Bussy!" cried Diane; "Bussy, help! help!"

The poor woman was mad; she no longer distinguished friends from enemies; whoever parted her from Bussy was her mortal foe.

"Go, go," said Bussy, "I will be with you soon."

"Yes," howled Monsoreau, "you will be with her; it is what I hope."

A shot was fired. Bussy saw Rémy totter, reel, and then fall, dragging Diane down with him.

Bussy uttered a cry, and turned.

"It is nothing," said Rémy, "it was I that was struck by the bullet; she is safe."

Three men flung themselves on Bussy when his attention was distracted by Rémy. Saint-Luc came between these three men and Bussy, and one of the three fell.

The two others recoiled.

"Saint-Luc," said Bussy, "Saint-Luc, in the name of her you love, save Diane!"

"But you?"

"I? I am a man."

Saint-Luc ran to Diane, who was on her knees, took her in his arms, and disappeared with her through the door.

"Help!" cried Monsoreau; "those on the stairs come up!"

"Ah! miscreant! Ah! coward!" cried Bussy.

Monsoreau retired behind his men.

With a back stroke Bussy cleft open a head; with a lunge he pierced a breast.

"That rids me of some of this rubbish," he said; then he returned behind his intrenchment.

"Fly, master, fly!" murmured Rémy.

"What! fly before assassins!"

Then leaning toward the young man:

"Diane must escape," said he; "but how do you feel?"

"Look out!" said Rémy, "look out!"

Four men were rushing in through the door opening on the stairs.

He was between two bands.

But he had only one thought.

"Diane!" he cried, "Diane!"

Then, without losing a second, he swooped down on these four men. Taken by surprise, two of them fell, one wounded, the other dead.

Then Monsoreau advanced, and, with a bound backward, Bussy was again behind his rampart.

"Shoot in the bolts," cried the grand huntsman, "turn the key; we have him now, we have him."

During this time, Rémy, making a final effort, had crawled up to Bussy, as if he would make his body a part of the rampart.

Both sides paused for a moment.

With his legs bent, his body holding fast to the wall, and his sword pointing straight before him, Bussy cast a quick glance around.

Seven men lay on the floor, nine were standing. Bussy counted them with his eyes.

But when he saw those nine swords, and heard Monsoreau trying to lash into fury those who held them, when he felt his feet splashing in blood, this hero, who had never known fear, beheld the spectre of death looming out of the depths of the chamber and beckoning him with its dismal smile.

"Of those nine," said he to himself, "I shall kill five more, but the four left will kill me. I have only strength for ten minutes' more fighting. Well! I must do during these ten minutes what man never did before and shall never do again!"

Then taking off his cloak and wrapping it about his left arm as a buckler, with a bound he was in the centre of the room, as if he deemed it unworthy of his fame to fight any longer under cover.

Then his sword shot out in this direction and that, like the fang of a coiled viper: thrice it pierced the leather of a shoulder-belt or the buff of a jacket, and thrice a thin thread of blood ran down to his right hand along the groove of the blade.

The cloak was hacked to pieces.

When two of their men fell and a third retreated the tactics of the assassins changed; they abandoned the sword; some fell on him with the butt-ends of their muskets, others fired off the pistols they had hitherto refrained from using. By his wonderful dexterity he avoided the bullets, now stooping, now leaping aside. In this supreme hour all his energies were multiplied; not only did he see, hear, and act, but he seemed to divine every movement of his enemies, however secret or sudden. The present moment was for Bussy the moment when the created being attains the very acme of perfection; he was less than a god, for he was mortal; but he was surely more than a man.

Then he thought that to kill Monsoreau was to end the combat; he searched for him among his assailants. But the grand huntsman, as calm as Bussy was excited, was stationed behind his cut-throats, loading their pistols or firing himself from his place of shelter.

But it was a simple thing for Bussy to make an opening; he dashed through the midst of the bandits, and was face to face with Monsoreau.

The latter, who had a loaded pistol in his hand, aimed and fired.

The bullet struck Bussy's sword, breaking off the blade six inches from the hilt.

"Disarmed!" cried Monsoreau. "disarmed!"

Bussy recoiled a step, and, as he did so, picked up his broken blade.

In an instant he had it fastened to his wrist by means of his handkerchief.

And the fight was on anew, exhibiting the unheard of spectacle of a man almost without arms, but also almost without wounds, holding six armed men at bay and making a rampart of the ten corpses piled up before him.

The fight was on anew and became more terrible than ever. While his men were again assailing Bussy, Monsoreau, guessing that his enemy was seeking for a weapon, drew to himself all that were within the young man's reach.

Bussy was surrounded. The fragment of his sword, hacked and bent, shook in his hand; his arm was stiff from fatigue: he looked around; suddenly one of the corpses, as if restored to life, rose on its knees and placed in his hand a long and excellent rapier.

The corpse was Rémy: his last effort in life was an act of self-devotion.

Bussy shouted with joy, and leaped back, to free his hand from the handkerchief and to get rid of his broken sword, which was now useless.

During the interval, Monsoreau approached Rémy, and fired a bullet into his brain.

Rémy fell back, with his skull shattered, this time to rise no more.

Bussy uttered a cry, or rather a roar.

Now that he could defend himself, his energy returned. With one hissing sweep of his sword, he cut off a wrist on his right and laid open a cheek on his left.

This double stroke cleared his way to the door.

As nimble as he was strong, he flung himself against it, and, with a violent exertion of his strength that made the wall tremble, he tried to break it in. But the bolts resisted.

Exhausted by the endeavor, Bussy dropped his right arm, while with his left he attempted to draw back the bolts behind him, but also facing his enemies.

During this time, he received a bullet in his thigh, and two swords pierced his sides.

But he had succeeded in drawing the bolts and turning the key.

With a roar of rage, and sublime in that rage, he swept one of the most ferocious of the bandits from his path, leaped at Monsoreau and wounded him in the breast.

The grand huntsman shrieked out an oath.

"Ah!" cried Bussy; pulling the door open, "I begin to think I shall escape."

The four men flung down their weapons and threw themselves on Bussy: their swords could not reach him, for his marvellous address rendered him invulnerable. They tried to

stifle him. But, striking them now with the pommel of his sword, now with the blade, he knocked down some and slashed others. Twice did Monsoreau come within reach of the young man's rapier and twice was he wounded.

But three men seized the hilt of his sword and tore it from his grasp.

Bussy picked up a carved wooden trivet, which was used as a foot-stool, and with it smote three men, knocking down two of them, but breaking it on the shoulder of the third, who held his ground, and plunged his dagger into Bussy's chest.

The young hero seized him by the wrist, pulled out the dagger and, with a rapid turn, forced the cut-throat to stab himself.

The last of the bandits jumped through the window.

Bussy advanced two steps to follow him, but Monsoreau, who was lying among the corpses, lifted his arm and planted a knife in his hip.

Bussy uttered a cry, looked round for a sword, found one, and drove it with such force through the grand huntsman's breast that he pinned him to the floor.

"Ah!" exclaimed Bussy, "I know not if death await me, but, at least, I have witnessed yours."

Monsoreau tried to answer; but only a sigh — his last one — escaped from the half-open lips.

Bussy then dragged himself to the corridor, while the blood streamed from the wound in his thigh, and especially from the one in his hip.

He threw a last look behind him.

The moon had just emerged from a cloud in all its splendor; its beams entered this chamber inundated with blood, shone on the window, and illuminated the walls that were hacked by swords and pierced by balls, and lightly touched, as they passed, the pale features of the dead, many of whose faces bore, even in death, the savage and menacing gaze of the assassin.

At the sight of this field of battle, peopled by his valor, wounded though he was, dying though he might be, Bussy felt his soul exalted by a pride that was sublime.

As he had said, he had done what no man but he could do.

There now remained nothing to be done but to escape, to fly; he could fly without dishonor, for he was flying before the dead.

But all was not over for the luckless young hero.

When he came to the staircase he saw the glitter of arms in the courtyard: a shot was fired: a bullet crashed through his shoulder.

The courtyard was guarded.

Then he thought of the little window through which Diane had expressed her intention of watching the combat on the next day, and he dragged himself to it as quickly as he could.

It was open, and through it shone the light of the innumerable stars that gemmed the beautiful sky.

Bussy shut and bolted the door behind him.

He raised himself up to the window with great difficulty, bestrode the sill, and measured with his eyes the distance to the iron trellis, wondering if he could jump to the other side of it.

"Oh! I shall never have the strength!" he murmured.

But at that moment he heard steps on the stairs; it was the second band coming up.

He was now utterly defenceless; he must make an effort. With the aid of the only hand and the only foot that could be used by him, he took a leap.

But, while doing so, the sole of his boot slipped on the stone.

His feet had trampled in so much blood!

He fell on the iron points; some of them penetrated his body; others caught his clothes, and he hung suspended.

Then he thought of the only friend now left him in the world.

"Saint-Luc!" he cried, "help! Saint-Luc! help!"

"Ah! so it is you, M. de Bussy," answered a voice that came from a clump of trees.

Bussy started. The voice was not the voice of Saint-Luc.

"Saint-Luc!" he cried again, "help! help! have no fear about Diane. I have killed Monsoreau."

He hoped Saint-Luc was hiding in the neighborhood and would come in response to these tidings.

"Ah! our friend Monsoreau is killed, then?" said another voice.

"Yes."

"Capital!"

And Bussy saw two men advancing from the trees; they were both masked.

"Gentlemen," said Bussy, "gentlemen, help a poor gentleman who can yet escape if you aid him."

"What do you say, monseigneur?" asked one of the two, in a low voice.

"How thoughtless you are!" said the other.

"Monseigneur!" cried Bussy, who had heard them, for the desperate nature of his position had sharpened his senses to the highest degree; "monseigneur! save me and I will pardon you for betraying me."

"You hear?" said the masked man.

"What are your orders?"

"Of course to save him."

Then he added in a tone of mockery and with a smile which his mask concealed:

"From further suffering."

Bussy turned his head in the direction of the voice that had dared to speak jeeringly at such a moment.

"Oh! I am lost!" he murmured.

At the same moment the muzzle of an arquebuse was placed against his breast and the weapon was fired. Bussy's head fell on his shoulders, and his hands stiffened.

"Assassin!" said he, "be accursed!"

And he expired with the name of Diane on his lips.

Drops of his blood fell from the trellis upon him who had been addressed as monseigneur.

"Is he dead?" cried several men, who, after breaking open the door, appeared at the window.

"Yes," answered Aurilly, "but fly; remember that his highness the Duc d'Anjou was the friend and protector of M. de Bussy."

The men asked no better than to fly; they vanished.

The duke heard the sound of their footsteps as they fled until it died away and was lost in the distance.

"Now, Aurilly," said he, "go upstairs and throw Monsoreau's body out of the window."

Aurilly did so. He recognized the grand huntsman's body among the heaps of corpses, raised it on his shoulder, and, as he had been ordered, threw it out of the window; as it fell it spattered the clothes of the duke with blood.

François rummaged the pockets in the grand huntsman's jerkin, and drew out of one of them the act of alliance he had signed with his own princely hand.

"I have got what I was looking for," said he. "We have nothing more to do here."

“ And Diane ? ” asked Aurilly from the window.

“ Oh, faith, I’m no longer in love with her, and, as she did not recognize us, untie her. Untie also Saint-Luc, and let both of them go where they like.”

Aurilly disappeared.

“ This document won’t make me king of France,” said the duke, tearing the act into pieces ; “ but neither will it cause me to be beheaded for high treason.”

CHAPTER XCIII.

HOW BROTHER GORENFLOT FOUND HIMSELF MORE THAN EVER
BETWEEN A GIBBET AND AN ABBEY.

THE conspiracy we have described retained its comedy features to the very end ; neither the Swiss, who had been, as it were, stationed at the mouth of this river of intrigue, nor the French guards, who had lain in wait at one of its confluents and spread their nets for the big fishes, had been able to catch even the small fry.

All had managed to escape through the burial-vault.

No one was seen to leave the abbey ; and this was the reason why Crillon, after the door was broken in, put himself at the head of thirty men and invaded the convent of Sainte Geneviève, accompanied by the King.

The silence of death reigned throughout the vast and gloomy structure.

Crillon, being a trained warrior, would have preferred a great uproar ; he feared an ambush.

But in vain were scouts sent in advance, in vain were doors and windows opened, in vain was the crypt searched in every direction — the place seemed entirely deserted.

The King marched at the head of the soldiers, sword in hand, and crying at the top of his voice :

“ Chicot ! Chicot ! ”

Nobody answered.

“ I wonder have they killed him ? ” said Henri. “ Mordieu ! if they have they shall pay for my jester the full value of a nobleman.”

"You are right, sire," answered Crillon, "for he is one of the bravest men that ever lived."

Chicot did not reply, for the simple reason that he was then engaged in flagellating M. de Mayenne and took so keen a pleasure in the task that he neither saw nor heard what was passing around him.

However, when the duke had vanished, when Gorenflot had fainted, as nothing now diverted his attention, he heard the call and recognized the royal voice.

"This way, my son, this way," he shouted, with all the strength of his lungs, while at the same time trying to raise Gorenflot to a sitting position.

He succeeded and propped him up against a tree.

The force he was obliged to expend on this charitable work robbed his voice of some of its sonorousness, so that for a moment Henri believed the cry he heard was the cry of a person in pain.

It was nothing of the sort, however; on the contrary, Chicot was in a state of the most delightful exultation and triumph. But when his eyes were turned on the monk, who was, certainly, in most piteous case, he asked himself whether he ought to let daylight into that treacherous paunch or treat that preposterous wine-barrel with clemency.

He stared, then, at Gorenflot as Augustus must have once stared for a moment at Cinna.

Gorenflot returned gradually to consciousness, and, stupid as he was, he had no illusion as to what he might expect; besides, he was not unlike those animals which, being constantly the prey of man, have an instinctive feeling that no hand will ever touch them except to beat them, no mouth ever come near them except to devour them.

Such was the state of his mind when he again opened his eyes.

"M. Chicot!" he cried.

"Hum! so you're not dead?" said the Gaseon.

"My kind friend," continued the monk, making an effort to join his hands before his enormous stomach, "surely you would not deliver your Gorenflot to his persecutors?"

"Rascal!" answered Chicot, but in a tone the tenderness of which was poorly disguised.

Gorenflot set up a howl.

Having succeeded at last in bringing his hands together, he wrung them.

"I who have eaten so many good dinners with you," he cried, in a voice choked by tears; "I who have drunk with you, and that so gracefully and elegantly that you have called me the King of the Sponges; I who used to be so fond of the fat pullets you ordered at the *Corne d'Abondance* that I never left anything behind me except the bones!"

This climax appeared sublime to Chicot and decided him in favor of clemency.

"Oh, Lord! there they are!" cried Gorenflot, trying to rise, but not succeeding; "there they are! they are coming. I'm a dead man! Oh! dear, dear M. Chicot, help me!"

And the monk, not being able to get up, adopted the easier plan of throwing himself flat on the ground.

"Rise," said Chicot.

"You forgive me?"

"We'll see."

"You have beaten me so much that I think I'm punished enough already."

Chicot burst out laughing. The wits of the poor monk were so addled that he actually believed he had received the lashes served out to Mayenne.

"You are laughing, my good M. Chicot?" said he.

"Of course I'm laughing, you donkey."

"Then I shall live."

"Perhaps."

"Oh, you would never laugh if your Gorenflot was going to die."

"The matter does not rest with me," answered Chicot, "it rests with the King: the King alone has the power of life and death."

Making a strong effort, Gorenflot managed to get on his two knees.

At this moment the darkness was dispelled by a dazzling light: men in embroidered costumes, and with swords that flashed in the glare of the torches, surrounded the two friends.

"Oh! Chicot! my dear Chicot!" cried the King, "how glad I am to see you again!"

"You hear, my dear M. Chicot," said the monk, in an undertone, "this great prince is glad to see you again."

"Well?"

"Well! in his gladness he won't refuse you anything you ask of him: ask him to pardon me."

"What! ask a favor of the abominable Herod?"

"Hush! hush! silence, my dear M. Chicot."

"Well, sire," inquired Chicot, turning round toward the King, "how many of them have you caught?"

"*Confiteor!*" said Gorenflot.

"Not one," answered Crillon. "The traitors! they must have found some avenue of escape unknown to us."

"It is probable," said Chicot.

"But you saw them?" asked the King.

"Certainly, I saw them."

"All?"

"From the first to the last."

"You recognized them, I suppose?"

"No, sire."

"How is it you did not recognize them?"

"I should say I recognized one of them, and yet" —

"And yet?"

"His face was n't the part of him I recognized, either, sire."

"And whom did you recognize?"

"M. de Mayenne."

"M. de Mayenne? The man to whom you owed a" —

"Well, we are now quits, sire."

"Ah, tell me all about it, Chicot."

"Later on, my son, later on; let us now give our attention to the present."

"*Confiteor!*" repeated Gorenflot.

"Ah! you have made a prisoner," said Crillon, suddenly, laying his heavy hand on Gorenflot, who in spite of the resistance afforded by his enormous bulk, bent under the pressure.

The monk became speechless.

Chicot did not answer at once, but allowed all the anguish that can spring from the most abject terror to fill the unfortunate monk's heart for a moment.

Gorenflot nearly fainted a second time when he saw so many wrathful faces around him.

At last, after a silence during which Gorenflot fancied he heard the trumpet of the last judgment sounding in his ears, Chicot said:

"Sire, look well at that monk."

One of the bystanders brought a torch close to Gorenflot's face; he closed his eyes, thinking that thus he might pass more easily from this world into the next.

“ The preacher Gorenflot ! ” cried Henri.

“ *Confiteor, confiteor, confiteor,* ” repeated the monk, rapidly.

“ Gorenflot himself, ” answered Chicot.

“ He who ” —

“ Yes, ” interrupted the Gascon.

“ Ah ! ” exclaimed the King, with an air of satisfaction.

The perspiration that streamed down Gorenflot’s cheeks would have filled a bucket.

And there was some reason for this. The sound of clashing swords rang out, as if the weapons themselves had become endowed with life and were quivering with anger.

Some of those present approached him with menacing looks.

Gorenflot felt rather than saw they were near him, and uttered a feeble cry.

“ Wait, ” said Chicot, “ the King must know everything. ”

And he took Henri aside.

“ My son, ” said he, in a whisper, “ give God thanks for allowing this holy man to be born, some thirty-five years ago ; for it is he who has saved us all. ”

“ How is that ? ”

“ It was he who related to me the whole conspiracy, from Alpha to Omega. ”

“ When ? ”

“ Nearly a week ago ; so that if your Majesty’s enemies ever find him, he is a dead man. ”

Gorenflot heard only the last words.

“ A dead man ! ”

And he fell flat on the ground again.

“ So worthy a man, ” said the King, casting a friendly glance on this mass of flesh which, to the eye of any sensible man, represented only an inordinate lump of matter calculated to absorb and quench any sparks of intelligence that resided within it, “ so worthy a man must be shielded by our protection. ”

Gorenflot caught in its flight that benevolent look, and, like the mask of the ancient parasite, smiled on one side of his face down to the teeth, and whimpered on the other up to his ear.

“ And you will do well to shield him, my King, ” answered Chicot, “ for he is one of the most astonishingly meritorious servants you have. ”

“ What do you think, then, I ought to do with him ? ” inquired the King.

"I think that as long as he remains in Paris he will run a great risk."

"If I gave him guards?" said the King.

Gorenflot heard this suggestion of Henri.

"Good!" said he. "It looks as if I should get off with imprisonment. I should certainly prefer that to the strappado, if they feed me as well."

"No," said Chicot, "it is n't necessary; all you have to do is to let me take him with me."

"Where?"

"To my lodgings."

"Then take him, but return to the Louvre; I am going there to find my friends and prepare them for to-morrow."

"Rise, reverend father," said Chicot to the monk.

"He can jeer at me! Oh, what a hard heart!" murmured Gorenflot.

"Get up, you beast," added Chicot, in an undertone, hitting him in the back with his knee.

"Ah! I know I have deserved this!" cried Gorenflot.

"What's that he says?" inquired the King.

"Sire," returned Chicot, "he remembers all his fatigues, he is recounting all his tortures, and, as I have promised him your Majesty's protection, he says, with a full consciousness of his merits: 'I know I have deserved this!'"

"Poor devil!" said the King. "Be sure you take good care of him, Chicot."

"Oh, you may be quite sure I shall. He'll want for nothing, as long as he is with me."

"Ah! M. Chicot!" cried Gorenflot, "my dear M. Chicot, where are they going to take me?"

"You'll soon know. Meanwhile, thank his Majesty, thou mountain of iniquity, thank his Majesty."

"For what?"

"Thank him, I tell you."

"Sire," stammered Gorenflot, "since your gracious Majesty"—

"Yes," interrupted Henri. "I know all you did for me after your journey to Lyons, during the night of the League, and, finally, to-day. Rest assured you shall be rewarded according to your deserts."

Gorenflot heaved a sigh.

"Where is Pamurge?" asked Chicot.

"In the stable, poor beast!"

"Well, go and get him; then ride back on him here."

"Yes, M. Chicot."

And the monk went away as fast as he could, astonished that no guards followed him.

"Now, my son," said Chicot, "keep twenty men for your own escort, and send ten others with M. de Crillon."

"Where am I to send them?"

"To the Hôtel d'Anjou; let them bring your brother back with them."

"Why should I do so?"

"To prevent him from escaping a second time."

"Why, has my brother?"

"Do you think you acted unwisely in following my advice to-day?"

"No, *par la mort dieu!*"

"Then do as I tell you."

Henri ordered the colonel of the French guards to bring the Duc d'Anjou to the Louvre.

Crillon, who was anything but partial to the prince, started immediately.

"And what are you going to do?" inquired Henri.

"Oh, I am waiting for my saint."

"But you'll come to the Louvre?"

"In an hour."

"Then I'll leave you."

"Go, my son."

Henri went off, followed by the rest of his attendants.

As for Chicot, he took his way to the stables. When he entered the courtyard, he saw Gorenflot mounted on Panurge.

The idea never entered the poor wretch's head of attempting to escape the fate he believed awaited him.

"Come," said Chicot, taking Panurge by the halter, "let us make haste, we are expected."

Gorenflot did not offer the slightest resistance, but he shed so many tears that he was actually growing thinner.

CHAPTER XCIV.

IN WHICH CHICOT GUESSES WHY D'ÉPERNON HAD BLOOD ON HIS FEET AND NONE IN HIS CHEEKS.

THE King, on returning to the Louvre, found his friends had retired and were sleeping peacefully.

Historical events have this singular influence: they lend to the incidents that have preceded them a certain reflected grandeur.

Those of our readers, then, who are interested in the events that were to take place on this very morning — for it was two o'clock when the King returned to the Louvre — and who will have their interest enhanced by their prevision of what was to occur, will, perhaps, also be somewhat moved by witnessing the visit of the King, after almost losing his crown, to his three friends, those friends who, in a few hours, will risk their lives in his cause.

The poet, whose privilege it is, not to foresee, but to divine, will, we are sure, find a certain melancholy charm in the aspect of those youthful faces, now reposing tranquilly, like brothers, in the household dormitory, on couches stationed side by side, a smile of confidence playing on their lips.

Henri stepped softly among them, followed by Chicot, who, after seeing that his friend Gorenflot was placed in safe keeping, had made his way back to the palace.

One bed was empty — D'Épernon's.

"Not returned yet? the thoughtless fellow!" murmured the King; "what an unfortunate fool he must be! He is to fight Bussy, the bravest man in France, Bussy, the most dangerous man in the whole world, and this is all the concern the matter gives him!"

"It looks that way at present," said Chicot.

"Some of my people must at once go in search of M. d'Épernon, and bring him back!" cried Henri. "Some one go for Miron, too; I want him to send this madcap fast asleep, whether he likes it or not; a sound sleep will strengthen and toughen him, will put him in good condition to defend himself."

"Sire," said an usher, "M. d'Épernon has just come in."

D'Épernon had, in fact, come in a little before. When he

learned of the King's return, and suspected that his Majesty would visit the common apartment of the minions, he stole rapidly thither, hoping that he might get there before Henri, and that his absence would not be discovered.

But several persons were looking for him, and, as we have seen, his arrival was announced to the King.

Seeing that he was in for a scolding, he felt considerably embarrassed as he approached the threshold.

"Ah! so here you are at last!" said Henri; "come here, you wretched scamp, and look at your friends."

D'Épernon looked round him, and signified by a gesture that he had seen them.

"Look at your friends: they have some common sense; they understand the importance of what is about to take place to-morrow, while you, wretch that you are, instead of praying as they have done, and sleeping as they are doing now, have been running through the streets and spending your time in every sort of debauchery. *Corbleu!* how pale you are! A nice figure you'll present to-morrow, when you look such a wreck to-night!"

D'Épernon's pallor was, indeed, very noticeable, though the last remark of the King called up a little color in his cheeks for a moment.

"Well," continued Henri, "go to bed now; I order you to do so, and sleep if you can. Do you think you can sleep?"

"I sleep! of course," answered D'Épernon, as if such a question was almost an insult.

"But what time have you for sleeping? Do you know that you are to fight at daybreak? Do you know that in this unfortunate season the sun rises at four o'clock? It is now two; so you have barely two hours to rest."

"Oh, a great deal can be done in two hours, if you employ them wisely," D'Épernon answered.

"Then you'll sleep?"

"Soundly, I assure you, sire."

"I don't believe a word of it."

"Why so?"

"Because you are excited, you are thinking of to-morrow. Alas! you are right, for to-morrow is to-day; but I try to forget it, try to imagine that the fatal hour is still distant."

"Sire, I will sleep, I promise you," said D'Épernon. "But how can I sleep if your Majesty will not let me sleep?"

"That's very true," said Chicot.

D'Épernon undressed and got into bed, all the time looking so calm and confident that Chicot, as well as the King, considered his bearing a good omen for the coming duel.

"He's as brave as Cæsar," answered the King.

"So brave," said Chicot, scratching his ear, "that, upon my soul, I can't make head or tail of it."

"Look, he is already asleep."

Chicot drew near the bed, for he could not believe that D'Épernon's serenity was as imperturbable as such a profound slumber would indicate.

"Oh! oh!" he exclaimed, suddenly.

"What is the matter?" asked the King.

"See!"

And Chicot pointed to D'Épernon's boots.

"Blood!" murmured the King.

"Yes, he has been walking in blood, my son. What a regular Hector our friend is!"

"Do you think he is wounded?" asked the King, anxiously.

"Nonsense! he would have told us if he were. And besides, unless he were wounded, like Achilles, in the heel" —

"Stop! his doublet is also spotted; look at the sleeve. What has happened, I wonder?"

"Perhaps he killed some one," answered Chicot.

"Why should he do so?"

"To keep his hand in."

"It is strange, is it not?" said the King.

Chicot scratched his ear with a much more serious air than usual.

"Hum! hum!" he muttered.

"You don't answer."

"Yes, I do. I say 'hum! hum!' That means a great deal, in my opinion."

"Good God!" cried Henri, "what is this that is happening around me, and what sort of a future am I to expect? Luckily, to-morrow" —

"To-day, my son; you are always making a jumble of things."

"Yes, you are right."

"Well, what about to-day, then?"

"To-day I shall be quite easy in my mind."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because these infernal Angevines will be slain."

"You believe so, Henri?"

"I am sure of it; my men are brave."

"I never heard that the Angevines were cowards."

"I don't say so, either; but my friends are so strong. Look at Schomberg's arms. Did you ever see such splendid muscle?"

"But did you ever see Antraguët's?"

"And then, see what an expression of resolution and command there dwells on Quélus's lips; and look at Maugiron's forehead, what an air of imperious pride sits on it even in his sleep. Those who own such faces cannot fail to conquer. When the lightning that flashes from these eyes strikes their enemies, their enemies will be half vanquished."

"Ah! my dear friend," said Chicot, sadly shaking his head, "I know of eyes as bright under brows as haughty that shoot forth flashes as terrible as those upon which you rely. Is this all you have to trust to?"

"No, come and I will show you something."

"Where?"

"In my cabinet."

"And does this something you are about to show me give you assurance of victory?"

"Yes."

"Come along, then."

"Wait a moment."

And Henri approached the couches of the young men.

"Why?" inquired Chicot.

"I do not want to do anything to-day, or rather to-morrow, that might sadden and depress them. And so I wish to bid them farewell now."

Chicot nodded.

"Do so, my son," said he.

The tone of voice in which Chicot uttered these few words was so melancholy that it sent a shudder through Henri's veins and brought the tears to his eyes.

"Adieu, my friends," he murmured; "adieu, my loyal friends."

Chicot turned his head; his heart was no more marble than that of the King. But his eyes were soon carried back, as if by an irresistible attraction, to the faces of the young favorites.

Henri stooped down and imprinted a light kiss on each of their foreheads.

The faint light of a taper alone illumined the scene, giving a funereal tinge to the draperies of the chamber and the countenances of the actors.

Chicot was not superstitious ; but when Henri's lips touched the foreheads of Maugiron, Quélus, and Schomberg, it looked to his imagination as if a living man, weighed down by a sorrow that was inconsolable, had come to bid a last farewell to the dead who were already lying in their tombs.

"Queer!" said Chicot to himself, "I never had this feeling before ; poor boys !"

Shortly after the King had finished embracing his friends, D'Épernon opened his eyes to see if he had left the room.

He had just passed out from it, leaning on Chicot's arm.

D'Épernon jumped out of bed and began to efface, as well as he could, the stains of blood on his boots and doublet.

This occupation brought back to his mind the scene in the Place de la Bastille.

"All the blood I have in my body," he said, "would not suffice to satiate that man who, with his own simple arm, shed so much blood to-night."

And he went to bed again.

As for Henri, he led Chicot to his cabinet, and, opening a long ebony coffer lined with white satin :

"Come here," said he, "and look."

"I see," answered Chicot, "swords. Well, what about them?"

"Yes, swords, but swords that have been blessed, my dear friend."

"By whom?"

"By our holy father the pope himself, who has granted me this favor. To send this coffer to Rome and get it back again cost me twenty horses and four men ; but I have the swords."

"Are they sharp?"

"Undoubtedly. But their peculiar and highest merit is that they are blessed."

"Oh, I know all that ; but I am not the less pleased on that account to learn that they are sharp."

"Pagan!"

"Very well, my son ; and now, let us speak of other things."

"As you like ; but be quick."

" You want to sleep ? "

" No, I want to pray."

" In that case we had better speak of matters of business at once. You have sent for M. d'Anjou ? "

" Yes, he is waiting below."

" What do you intend to do with him ? "

" Throw him into the Bastile."

" A wise determination. But see to it that his dungeon is very deep and very secure ; the sort of a dungeon, for example, that was occupied by the constable Saint Paul or Jacques d'Armagnac."

" Make your mind easy on that point."

" I know where you can purchase the most beautiful black velvet you ever saw, my son."

" Chicot ! he is my brother."

" You are correct ; of course, at court the family mourning is violet. Do you intend to speak to him ? "

" Yes, certainly I shall do so, if only for the purpose of depriving him of all hope by showing him that his plots are discovered."

" Hum ! " muttered Chicot.

" Do you think I expose myself to any danger by conversing with him ? "

" No : still, if I were in your place, I should cut short the conversation and double the imprisonment."

" Let the Duc d'Anjou be led into my presence," said Henri.

" All the same," said Chicot, " I hold the same opinion still."

A moment later, the duke entered ; he was very pale, and without any weapon. Crillon followed, carrying the prince's sword.

" Where did you find him ? " the King asked Crillon, speaking as if he were entirely oblivious of the duke's presence.

" Sire, his highness was not at home ; but a few moments after I had taken possession of his hôtel in your Majesty's name, his highness returned, and we arrested him ; he did not offer any resistance."

" It is very fortunate he did not," said the King, scornfully. Then turning to the prince :

" Where were you, monsieur ? " he inquired.

" Wherever I was, sire," answered the duke, " you may be convinced that I was devoting myself to your Majesty's service."

"Ah! indeed! I suspected as much," answered Henri; "and your answer proves that I was not wrong in doing you the sort of service you would do me."

François bowed, calmly and respectfully.

"Come, now, where were you?" said the King, marching straight up to his brother, "what were you doing during the time your accomplices were being arrested?"

"My accomplices?" asked François.

"Yes, your accomplices," repeated the King.

"Surely your Majesty must have received some information regarding me that is utterly false."

"Oh, this time you shall not escape me, monsieur; your crimes are about to be brought to an end. You are not going to have another chance of succeeding to my throne, my brother" —

"Sire, sire, for mercy's sake, be moderate; some one must certainly have embittered you against me."

"Wretch!" cried Henri, beside himself with rage, "you shall die of hunger in a dungeon in the Bastile."

"I bow to your orders, sire, and bless them, though they should doom me to death."

"But do you refuse to tell me where you were, hypocrite?"

"Sire, I was engaged in the task of defending your Majesty, and was working for the glory and tranquillity of your reign."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the King, almost paralyzed with amazement; "upon my honor, such audacity astounds me!"

"Hum!" said Chicot, throwing himself back in his chair, "tell us all about it, prince; the story ought to be curious."

"Sire, I would have told your Majesty the whole affair already, had you treated me as a brother; now that you treat me as a criminal, I will wait until the result of my actions speak for me."

Then with a salutation to the King, more profound and reverential than the one before, he turned to Crillon and the other officers present:

"Now, gentlemen," said he, "which of you is to conduct the first prince of the blood of France to the Bastile?"

Chicot had been reflecting: a sudden thought flashed through his mind.

"Aha!" he murmured, "I think I understand now why M. D'Épernon had so much blood on his feet and so little in his cheeks."

CHAPTER XCIV.

THE MORNING OF THE COMBAT.

A BEAUTIFUL day rose over Paris. The ordinary citizen never suspected that it would be a day marked by any unusual incident; but the gentlemen of the King's party and the gentlemen of the Duc de Guise's party — the latter still in a dazed condition — were perfectly aware of what was going to happen and were already prudently preparing to offer timely congratulations to the side that would be victorious.

The King, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, did not sleep during the night: he wept and prayed; and as, with all his faults, he was a brave man, versed in war, and with a special knowledge of everything connected with duelling, he rose at three in the morning and started with Chicot to render his friends the only service he could render them now.

He went to visit the ground where the combat was to take place.

This expedition of the King was very noticeable, and, let us say so without being accused of jesting, — very little noticed.

Clad in a costume of sombre hue, enveloped in a large cloak, his sword by his side, and his hat slouched down over his hair and eyes, he followed the Rue Saint-Antoine until he came within a hundred yards of the Bastille; but when at that point, he remarked that there was a great crowd of people above the Rue Saint-Paul; he did not care to venture among this crowd; so he turned into the Rue Sainte-Catherine and reached the paddock at Les Tournelles by a back way.

What the crowd were doing may be guessed; they were counting the dead of the night before.

Henri, by keeping at a distance from this excited multitude, missed an opportunity of learning what had occurred.

Chicot, who had been present at the quarrel, or rather at the agreement, made between the minions and Angevines a week before, pointed out to the King, upon the field of battle itself, the places to be occupied by the combatants and explained to him the conditions of the combat.

Henri was so busy measuring the spaces, looking between the trees, and calculating the position of the sun, that he hardly attended to him.

"Quélus," said he, "will be badly exposed; he will have the sun on his right, just in his only eye;¹ while Maugiron will be entirely in the shade. Quélus ought to have taken Maugiron's place, and Maugiron, who has excellent eyes, that of Quélus. Matters have been very badly managed so far. As for Schomberg, who is somewhat weak in the legs, he has a tree which he can lean against in case of need. I am not alarmed, then, about him; but Quélus, my poor Quélus!"

And he shook his head sadly.

"You really make me feel uncomfortable, my King," said Chicot. "Come, now, do not give way to despair in this fashion; what the devil! whatever is to be will be."

The King raised his eyes to heaven and sighed.

"Thou hearest, O Lord, how he blasphemeth," he murmured, "but happily thou knowest he is a fool."

Chicot at this drew himself up.

"And D'Épernon," continued the King; "ah! how unjust I am! I never thought of him; and he will be Bussy's opponent, too; look how he will be exposed, my dear Chicot! look at the lie of the ground: on his left, a barrier; on his right, a tree, and a ditch behind him; and D'Épernon will have to give way every moment, for Bussy is a lion, a tiger, a serpent; he is a living sword that leaps forward, springs back, expands, contracts."

"Bah!" said Chicot, "I have no anxiety about D'Épernon."

"You are wrong, he will get killed."

"He! not such a booby; he'll take good care of himself, you may rest assured."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that he won't fight, *mordieu!*"

"Nonsense! did n't you hear what he said an hour ago?"

"Plainly."

"Well?"

"Well, it's because I heard what he said that I say he won't fight."

"What a cynical sceptic you are!"

"I know my Gascon, Henri; but if you take my advice, sire, we'll get away from here and return to the Louvre; you see it is broad daylight."

"You don't imagine I am going to stay in the Louvre during the combat?"

¹ Quélus had lost his left eye in a duel.

"*L'entre de biche !* but you must. Why, if you were to be seen here, every one would say, in case your friends were victorious, that they owed their victory to certain magical practices of yours, and, if they were conquered, they were so because you brought them bad luck."

"And what care I for such gossip and calumny ; I will show my love for them even to the end."

"I'm not going to quarrel with you having a strong mind, Henri ; I think even I ought to compliment you on your affection for your friends, it is a virtue that is very seldom found among princes ; but I do not wish you to leave M. d'Anjou by himself in the Louvre."

"Is not Crillon there?"

"Crillon ? Oh, Crillon is simply a buffalo, a rhinoceros, a wild boar, everything that is valorous and indomitable ; while your brother is a viper, a rattlesnake, is any animal you like whose power lies less in its strength than in its venom."

"You are right ; I should have thrown him into the Bastile."

"I told you you did wrong to see him."

"I know it, but his assurance, his coolness, and the service he claims to have rendered me got the better of me."

"The more reason why you should have distrusted him. But take my word for it, Henri, we ought to return."

Henri followed Chicot's advice and started with him on the way to the Louvre, after giving one last look at the field of combat.

Everybody was up in the Louvre when the King and Chicot entered.

The four young men were the first to awaken and were now being dressed by their valets.

The King inquired what they were doing.

He was told Schomberg was practising with his rapier, Quéhus was bathing his eye, Maugiron was drinking a glass of Spanish wine, and D'Épernon was sharpening his sword on a stone. *

He could be seen at this task, having ordered a sandstone to be brought to the door of the common room for the purpose.

"And you say that man is not a Bayard?" said Henri, gazing at him fondly.

"Yes, I say that he is a knife-grinder, and that's the end of it," retorted Chicot.

D'Épernon looked up and cried : "The King!"

Then, in spite of the resolution he had taken, and which, in any case, he would have hardly had the strength to keep, Henri entered the chamber.

We have already stated that he had, when he liked, a most majestic mien, as well as great self-control.

His serene and almost smiling countenance did not betray the feelings of his heart.

“Good day, gentlemen,” said he; “I hope I find you in good spirits.”

“Thank God! yes, sire,” answered Quéhus.

“Still, I fancy you look rather gloomy, Maugiron.”

“Sire, I am very superstitious, as your Majesty is aware; I had bad dreams last night; so I am drinking a little wine to restore my cheerfulness.”

“My dear friend,” said the King, “you ought to remember — and I have the authority of Miron, who is a great doctor, for what I say — you ought to remember, I repeat, that dreams are the impressions of the previous day and have no influence on the actions of the morrow, except, of course, by the will of God.”

“Consequently, sire, you find me preparing for the combat,” said D’Épernon; “I, too, had bad dreams last night; but, in spite of dreams, my arm is strong and my eye clear.”

And he fenced against the wall, in which he made a cut with the sword he had just whetted.

“Yes,” said Chicot, “you dreamed you had blood on your boots. That dream is not bad; it signifies that you will one day be a great conqueror, after the manner of Alexander and Cæsar.”

“My brave friends,” said Henri, “you know that the honor of your prince is at stake, since, in a certain sense, it is his cause that you defend; but his honor only — do not be mistaken on that point — therefore, give yourselves no concern about the safety of my person. The events of the past night have so strengthened my throne that, for some time at least, no shock, however violent, can harm it. Fight, then, for the sake of honor alone.”

“Sire, you need not be uneasy,” answered Quéhus, “we may, perhaps, lose our lives, but our honor will remain intact.”

“Gentlemen,” continued the King, “I love you tenderly, and I esteem you also. Let me, then, give you one advice: no false bravery; it is not by dying that you can serve me, but by killing your enemies.”

"Oh, as far as I am concerned," said D'Épernon, "I do not intend to give quarter."

"I," said Quélus, "will promise nothing; I will do what I can."

"And I," said Maugiron, "will promise your Majesty that, if I am to die, I shall first kill my adversary."

"Do you fight with the sword alone?"

"With sword and dagger," answered Schomberg.

The King pressed his hand on his heart.

The hand and heart that then met may have told each other of their fears by their shuddering pulsations; but, externally, Henri's bearing was high, his eye tearless, and his lips haughty; he was, indeed, every inch a king, and looked as if he were sending his soldiers to battle, not his friends to death.

"In good sooth, my King," said Chicot, "at this moment you seem truly royal."

The gentlemen were ready; it only remained for them to bid farewell to their master.

"Do you ride to the ground?" inquired Henri.

"No, sire," answered Quélus, "we walk; it is a healthful exercise, it clears the head, and your Majesty has often said that it is the head rather than the arm which directs the sword."

"You are right, my son. Your hand."

Quélus inclined and kissed the King's hand; the others did the same.

D'Épernon knelt, saying:

"Sire, bless my sword."

"No, D'Épernon," said the King; "hand your sword to your page. I have better swords for you than your own; bring the swords here, Chicot."

"No," said the Gascon, "give this commission to the captain of your guards, my son; I am but a fool, you know, and a pagan also; and the celestial benedictions might change into fatal incantations, if my good friend the devil chanced to look at my hands and saw what they were carrying."

"What swords are these, sire?" inquired Schomberg, glancing at the box which an officer had brought in.

"Italian swords, my son; swords forged at Milan, basket-hilted, as you see; and as, with the exception of Schomberg, you all have delicate hands, you could be easily disarmed if your hands were not well protected."

"Thanks, thanks, your Majesty," said the four young men in unison.

"Go, it is time," said the King, who could no longer control his emotion.

"Sire," asked Quélus, "shall we not have your Majesty's presence to encourage us?"

"No, that would not be seemly; you will be supposed to fight without my sanction and even without my knowledge. Nor must we attach any peculiar or solemn significance to the combat; it must be thought to be the result of a private quarrel."

And he dismissed them with a gesture that was truly majestic.

When they had vanished from his presence, and their valets had crossed the threshold of the Louvre, and the noise of the spurs and cuirasses worn by their squires was no longer heard, Henri flung himself on a dais, saying:

"This will kill me."

"Well," said Chicot, "I am determined to see this duel; I don't know why, but I have a notion that something queer will happen with respect to D'Épernon."

"And you, too, are leaving me, Chicot?" said the King, dismally.

"Yes," answered Chicot: "for if any of them fail in his duty, I wish to be there, so as to take his place and sustain the honor of my King."

"Go, then," said Henri.

As soon as the Gascon received permission to depart, he was off like a shot.

The King returned to his chamber, ordered all the shutters to be closed, and forbade any person in the Louvre to utter a cry or a word. To Crillon, who knew everything that was about to happen, he said:

"If we are the victors, Crillon, you will tell me so; if, on the contrary, we are vanquished, you will knock thrice at my door."

"Yes, sire," answered Crillon, shaking his head.

CHAPTER XCVI.

BUSSY'S FRIENDS.

LIKE the friends of the King, the friends of the Duc d'Anjou had also slept soundly during the night.

After a hearty supper, during which, however, their master had not honored them with either his advice or presence, for François did not by any means take the same anxious interest in his favorites that Henri took in his minions, they retired to comfortable couches in Antragnet's hôtel; they had decided to meet in this mansion on account of its proximity to the field of battle.

Ribeirac's squire, a great hunter and a clever armorer, had spent the whole day in cleaning, furbishing, and sharpening their weapons.

He was also ordered to waken the young men at daybreak, an office he was in the habit of discharging for his master on the morning of every festival, hunt, or duel.

Before supper Antragnet had gone to visit a little shopgirl in the Rue Saint-Denis whom he idolized. Ribeirac had written to his mother, and Livarot had made his will.

At the stroke of three, that is to say, at an hour when the King's friends were hardly yet awake, they were all on their feet, fresh and brisk, and already armed.

They had put on red breeches and red stockings, so that their enemies might not see their blood, and that they might not be frightened by it themselves. They wore doublets of gray silk, so that, should they fight entirely dressed, their movements might not be embarrassed by the folds of a coarser material; finally, they were shod in shoes without heels, and their pages carried their swords, to save their arms and shoulders from all unnecessary fatigue.

It was glorious weather for love or war or walking; a brilliant sun gilded the gables of the roofs, upon which the dew-drops of the previous night were still sparkling.

An odor at once pungent and delicious, rose from the gardens and was diffused through the streets. The pavement was dry and the air bracing.

Before leaving the house, the young men had sent a messenger to the Duc d'Anjou to inquire for Bussy.

The messenger was to find out whether he had left the hôtel alone and armed.

He was informed that he had gone out, accompanied by Rémy, and that both of them had their swords.

He was also told at the count's hôtel that no one was disturbed by his absence. He often absented himself in this way; but he was known to be so brave, strong, and adroit that, no matter how long he stayed away, his people felt little anxiety on his account.

All these details were repeated to his three friends.

"Oh, I understand," said Antragnet. "You have heard, gentlemen, have you not, that the King has ordered a great stag-hunt in the forest of Compiègne, and that M. de Monsoreau was to leave Paris yesterday?"

"Yes," answered the young men.

"Then I know where he is: while the grand huntsman is rousing the stag, he is chasing the grand huntsman's doe. Do not be uneasy, gentlemen, he is nearer to us than you imagine, and will be on the ground before us."

"Yes," said Livarot, "but he is sure to be worried and fatigued after a sleepless night."

Antragnet shrugged his shoulders.

"Bussy fatigued?" he answered; "nonsense! Come along, gentlemen, we'll call for him on our way."

And all started.

It was just at the very moment when Henri was distributing the swords to their enemies; and so they were ten minutes in advance of the latter.

As Antragnet's hôtel was near Saint-Eustache, they took the Rue des Lombards, the Rue de la Verrerie, and, finally, the Rue Saint-Antoine.

All these streets were deserted. The peasants who came from Montreuil, Vincennes, and Saint-Maur-les-Fossés with their milk and vegetables, and who were dozing on their carts and mules, were the only persons that had the privilege of seeing this group of proud and valiant gentlemen, followed by their three pages and their three squires.

There were now neither bravadoes, nor cries, nor threats; they knew they must fight to a finish, kill or be killed; they knew that, on both sides, the duel would be furious, deadly, merciless, and such knowledge makes men thoughtful; on that morning the giddiest of the trio was the most pensive.

When they reached the top of the Rue Saint-Catherine, all three turned their eyes in the direction of Monsoreau's little house, with a smile that indicated the existence of the same thought in each of their minds.

"The ground can be easily seen from yonder," said Antraguët, "and I have no doubt poor Diane will look out of her window more than once."

"Hold on," exclaimed Ribeirac, "she is there already, if I be not deceived."

"Why do you think so?"

"It is open."

"True. But why is that ladder hanging from the balcony when the building has doors?"

"I fact, it's queer," said Antraguët.

All three approached the house with an inward presentiment that they were drawing near to some important discovery.

"And we are not the only people to be astonished," said Livarot. "Look at you peasants who stand up in their wagons as they pass to peer into the house."

The young men were now under the balcony.

A market-gardener was there before them and seemed to be examining the ground at his feet.

"Ho, there! Seigneur de Monsoreau," cried Antraguët, "do you intend to come and witness the fight? You had better make haste, for we wish to be the first on the ground."

They waited in vain for an answer.

"There is no reply," said Ribeirac; "but what the devil is the meaning of that ladder?"

"I say, you fellow," said Livarot to the market-gardener, "was it you that threw up that ladder there?"

"God forbid, gentlemen!" he answered.

"And why so?" inquired Antraguët.

"Look up."

The three young men raised their heads.

"Blood!" cried Ribeirac.

"Faith, yes, blood," said the villager, "and very black blood, too."

"The door has been forced," said Antraguët's page at the same moment.

Antraguët glanced at the door and window, and, seizing the ladder, was on the balcony in an instant.

He looked into the chamber.

"What has happened?" asked the others, who saw him stagger and turn pale.

A terrible cry was his only answer.

Livarot had climbed up behind him.

"Dead bodies! death, death everywhere!" he shouted.

And both entered the room.

Ribeirac remained below, fearing a surprise.

During this time the cries of the market-gardener arrested the footsteps of all who were going by.

The chamber bore in all parts the traces of the terrible struggle that had occurred on the night before. Stains or rather streams of blood were on the floor. The hangings had been hacked by swords and riddled by bullets. The furniture, shattered and soiled with blood, was strewn over the apartment, intermingled with fragments of flesh and clothing.

"Oh! Rémy! poor Rémy!" said Antraguët, suddenly.

"Dead?" asked Livarot.

"Already cold."

"Why, a regiment of reiters must have passed through this room!" exclaimed Livarot.

Then Livarot saw that the door of the corridor was open. Spots of blood showed that on this side also there had been a struggle; he followed the hideous traces before him and came to the staircase.

The courtyard was empty and solitary.

Meanwhile, Antraguët, instead of following him, went to the next room; there was blood everywhere, and this blood reached as far as the window. He leaned out and gazed with terrified eyes into the little garden.

The spikes of the iron trellis still held fast the livid and rigid body of the unfortunate Bussy.

At this sight it was not a cry, but a roar, that escaped from the breast of Antraguët.

Livarot ran up.

"Look," said Antraguët, "Bussy dead!"

"Bussy assassinated and flung from the window! Come in, Ribeirac, come in!"

During this time, Livarot started for the court-yard, and, meeting Ribeirac at the bottom of the stairs, took him with him.

A little door led from the courtyard to the garden, and they passed through.

"It is indeed he!" cried Livarot.

"And his wrist is hacked," said Ribeirac.

"And he has two bullets in his chest."

"He has been stabbed by daggers in every part of his body."

"Ah! poor Bussy!" howled Antragnet; "vengeance! vengeance!"

Turning round, Livarot's foot came in contact with another corpse.

"Monsoreau!" he exclaimed.

"What! Monsoreau, too?"

"Yes, with as many holes in him as in a sieve, and with his head shattered by the pavement."

"Why, all our friends have been murdered last night!"

"And his wife, his wife," cried Antragnet; "Diane, Madame Diane!"

But there was no answer, except an exclamation of horror now and then from the people who began to swarm around the house.

This was the moment when the King and Chicot had reached the top of the Rue Sainte-Catherine and turned away to avoid the crowd.

"Bussy! poor Bussy!" cried Ribeirac, in despair.

"Yes," said Antragnet, "they were determined to get rid of the most terrible enemy they had amongst us."

"Oh! what dastards and caitiffs!" cried the two other young men.

"Let us go and complain to the duke," cried one of them.

"No," said Antragnet, "the work of vengeance is for ourselves alone: otherwise, my friend, we should be but poorly avenged; wait for me."

In a second he descended and joined Livarot and Rebeirac.

"Look, my friends," said he, "at the noble face of the bravest of men, behold the still ruddy drops of his blood; he has set us an example; he never charged others with the task of avenging his wrongs. Bussy! Bussy! we will act like thee, and be assured we will avenge thee."

Then he uncovered, pressed his lips to Bussy's lips, and drawing his sword bathed it in Bussy's blood.

"Bussy," said he, "I swear on thy dead body that this blood shall be laved in the blood of thy enemies!"

"Bussy," said the others, "we swear to kill them or die!"

"Gentlemen," said Antraguët, sheathing his sword, "no mercy, no quarter; do you agree?"

"No mercy, no quarter," they repeated.

"But," said Livarot, "we shall now be only three against four."

"Yes, but we have not committed murder," said Antraguët, "and God will strengthen the innocent. Adieu, Bussy!"

"Adieu, Bussy," repeated his companions.

And they passed out from that accursed house, pale and horror-stricken.

They had there found, along with the image of death, the desperation that multiplies the strength of man a hundred fold; they had there been inspired with that generous indignation which renders a human being superior to his mortal essence.

The crowd had become so large during the past quarter of an hour that they had some difficulty in forcing their way through it.

On arriving at the ground, they saw that their antagonists were waiting for them, some sitting on stones, others in picturesque attitudes on the wooden barriers.

Then they ran forward, ashamed of being the last to reach the paddock.

The four minions had with them four squires.

Their four swords, lying on the ground, seemed to be, like themselves, waiting and resting.

"Gentlemen," said Quélus, rising and bowing with a sort of stately arrogance, "we have had the honor of waiting for you."

"Excuse us, gentlemen," answered Antraguët; "we should have been here before you had we not been delayed by one of our companions."

"M. de Bussy?" inquired D'Épernon; "in fact, I do not see him. Apparently he is not much in a hurry this morning."

"Well, as we have waited until now," said Schomberg, "we can easily wait a little longer."

"M. de Bussy will not come," answered Antraguët.

Profound amazement was painted on every face. D'Épernon's alone expressed a different feeling.

"He will not come?" said he; "oho! the bravest of the brave is afraid, then, is he?"

"No, that cannot be the reason," returned Quélus.

"You are right, *monsieur*," said Livarot.

"But why will he not come?" asked Maugiron.

"Because he is dead," answered Antraguët.

"Dead!" cried the minions.

D'Épernon did not speak, but turned slightly pale.

"And dead because assassinated!" replied Antraguët.

"You are not aware of it, gentlemen?"

"No," said Quélus, "and why should we be?"

"Besides, are you quite sure?" asked D'Épernon.

Antraguët drew his rapier.

"As sure," said he, "as that the blood upon my sword is his blood."

"Assassinated!" cried all the King's friends except D'Épernon. "M. de Bussy assassinated!"

D'Épernon still shook his head, with an air of doubt.

"This blood cries aloud for vengeance," said Ribeirac; "do you not hear it, gentlemen?"

"Oh, I see!" returned Schomberg, "your grief covers a certain insinuation, apparently."

"Suppose it does?"

"What does all this mean?" cried Quélus.

"*Search for him to whom the crime is profitable*," the legislator says," murmured Livarot.

"Come, gentlemen, explain what you mean clearly and frankly," cried Maugiron, in a voice of thunder.

"That is just what we are here for, gentlemen," said Ribeirac, "and we have now more cause for cutting your throats than ever."

"Then to it quick! draw your swords," said D'Épernon, unsheathing his; "to it at once."

"Oh! what a hurry you are in, Mister Gascon!" said Livarot. "You didn't crow quite so loud when we were four against four."

"Is it our fault if you are now only three?" answered D'Épernon.

"Yes, it is your fault," cried Antraguët. "He is dead, because you would rather have him lying in the tomb than standing here before you; he is dead, with his hand mangled, in order that that hand might no longer hold a sword; he is dead, because you were determined at any price, that those eyes should be sightless whose lightning would have blinded the whole four of you. Do you understand? Do I make my meaning clear?"

Schomberg, D'Épernon, and Maugiron howled with rage.

"Enough, gentlemen, enough," said Quélus. "Withdraw, M. D'Épernon, we will fight three against three. These gentlemen shall see if, notwithstanding our right, we are men to take advantage of a misfortune which we deplore as much as they do. 'Come, gentlemen," added the young man, flinging his hat behind him and raising his left hand, while with his right he swept his sword through the air so that it hissed. "Come, and when you see us fighting under the open sky and beneath the eye of God, you will then be able to judge if we be assassins. To your posts, gentlemen! to your posts!"

"Ah! I hated you before," said Schomberg, "now I excrete you."

"And an hour ago I would have killed you," said Antragnet, "now I would cut you into pieces. On guard! gentlemen, on guard!"

"With doublets or without?" asked Schomberg.

"Without either doublet or shirt," said Antragnet; "with breasts bare and hearts uncovered."

The young men laid aside their doublets and pulled off their shirts.

"Stay!" said Quélus, as he was undressing, "I have lost my dagger. It was loose in the sheath and must have fallen on the way."

"Or, perhaps, you left it at M. de Monsoreau's house in the Place de Bastille, and did not dare to draw it from its sheath," said Antragnet.

Quélus uttered a cry of rage and fell into position.

"But he has no dagger, M. Antragnet, he has no dagger," cried Chicot, who had just arrived on the field of battle.

"So much the worse for him," answered Antragnet; "it is not my fault."

And, drawing his dagger with his left hand, he fell into position also.

CHAPTER XCVII.

THE COMBAT.

THE ground where this terrible duel was to be fought was, as we have already stated, sheltered by trees. It was secluded, and usually frequented only by children, who came to play there during the day, or by drunkards and thieves, who came to sleep there during the night.

The barriers, erected by the horsedealers, naturally kept off the crowd, for a crowd, like the waves in a river, follows the current of the stream and does not stop or veer from it unless it is strongly attracted by some contrary current.

As a rule, the wayfarer preferred going round the enclosure to passing through it.

Moreover, it was very early, and people were too eager to hurry to the blood-stained house of Monsoreau to think of anything else.

Chicot, whose heart was beating fast, although he was not of a very tender disposition, sat in front of the pages and lackeys on a wooden railing.

He was not fond of the Angevines and he detested the minions; but they were all brave young fellows, and through their veins there coursed a generous blood which would soon, probably, stream forth before his eyes under the light of day.

D'Épernon risked a last bravado.

"What! are they all afraid of me, then?" he cried.

"Hold your tongue, babbler," said Antraguët.

"I want my rights," answered D'Épernon. "It was to be a party of eight, and I was to be one of them."

"Keep off, I say!" said Ribeirac, angrily, barring his passage.

He turned back, and, making a vain attempt to look like a disappointed hero, sheathed his sword.

"Come," said Chicot, "come away, O flower of valor, or you may lose another pair of shoes, as you did yesterday."

"What is this buffoon saying?"

"I say that there will be soon blood on the ground, and you are sure to walk in it, as you did last night."

D'Épernon turned livid. His effrontery could not hold out against this terrible attack.

He sat ten yards away from Chicot, looking now and then at him fearfully.

Ribeirac and Schomberg approached each other, after the customary salute.

Quélus and Antraguët, who were already on guard, crossed steel, after taking a step forward.

Maugiron and Livarot contented themselves with feinting and watching each the sword-play of his adversary.

The combat began when the clock of Saint-Paul's struck five.

Fury was depicted on the faces of the combatants; but their tightly pressed lips, the menacing pallor of their faces, the involuntary trembling of their wrists, indicated that this fury was a force which it was prudent to retain in all its violence, for when once unchained, like a fiery steed freed from the curb, it would create great devastation in its course.

For several minutes — an enormous space of time on such an occasion — there was a friction rather than a clashing of swords.

Not a stroke was given.

Ribeirac, fatigued, or rather satisfied with his trial of his adversary's style, lowered his hand and waited for a moment.

Schomberg took two rapid steps forward; his sword gleamed like a flash of lightning from the bosom of a cloud. It was the first stroke.

Ribeirac was hit.

His skin turned livid, and a jet of blood spurted from his shoulder; he fell back to examine the wound.

Schomberg endeavored to repeat the stroke; but Ribeirac struck up his sword, parried in prime, and wounded him in the side.

Each of them, then, had his wound.

"Now let us rest for a few seconds, if you have no objection," said Ribeirac.

Meanwhile, Quélus and Antraguët were hotly at work on their side; but Quélus, having no dagger, was at a great disadvantage; he was obliged to parry with his left arm, and, as this arm was bare, every parry cost him a wound.

Although he was not seriously injured, his hand, in a few seconds, was entirely covered with blood.

Antraguët, who saw his advantage, and who was quite as adroit as Quélus, parried with extreme wariness.

With three parries and thrusts he wounded Quélus thrice in the breast.

But Quélus was not mortally hurt, although streams of blood ran down his body, and, every time he was touched, he repeated :

“ It is nothing.”

Livarot and Maugiron were still engaged in their cautious play.

As for Ribeirac, mad with pain, and feeling that with his loss of blood he was losing his strength, he made a sudden leap at Schomberg.

Schomberg did not recoil a step and simply stretched out his sword.

Both of the young men made several stealthy thrusts at each other.

Ribeirac was pierced through the breast, and Schomberg was wounded in the neck.

Ribeirac's wound was mortal : he applied his left hand to it, thereby uncovering himself.

Schomberg took advantage of the opportunity and gave him a second thrust which penetrated his side.

But Ribeirac with his right hand grasped the hand of his adversary, and with his left plunged his dagger into his breast up to the hilt.

The blade passed through the heart.

Schomberg uttered a hollow groan and fell on his back, dragging down Ribeirac, still pierced by the sword.

Livarot, seeing his friend fall, retreated a step, and then ran quickly, pursued by Maugiron, to his aid.

He gained on his pursuer, and, helping Ribeirac in his efforts to free himself from Schomberg's sword, he pulled it from his breast.

But Maugiron was now near him, and he was obliged to fight him with the disadvantage of a slippery ground, an imperfect guard, and the glare of the sun in his eyes.

At the end of a second, Maugiron pierced the head of Livarot, who dropped his sword and fell on his knees.

Quélus was closely pressed by Antragnet. Maugiron stabbed Livarot a second time, and the latter fell flat on the ground.

D'Épernon uttered a loud cry.

And now Antragnet had to face both Quélus and Maugiron. Quélus was covered with blood, but his wounds were slight.

Maugiron was as yet almost scathless.

Anraguet saw his peril; he had not received even a scratch; but he was beginning to feel fatigued. It was not the moment, however, to ask for a truce from one man who was wounded and from another who was hot for carnage. With a rapid movement he violently thrust aside the sword of Quélus and jumped lightly over a barrier.

Quélus wheeled round and dealt him a blow, but it only cut into the wood.

At the same moment, Maugiron attacked Anraguet behind. The latter turned round.

Quélus profited by this movement to creep under the barrier.

"He is lost!" thought Chicot.

"Long live the King!" cried D'Épernon; "at him! my lions, at him!"

"Silence, if you please, monsieur," said Anraguet. "Do not insult a man who will fight till his last breath."

"And a man who is not yet dead," cried Livarot.

And, at the very moment when no one was any longer thinking of him, Livarot rose upon his knees, hideous with the bloody mire that covered his body, and plunged his dagger between the shoulders of Maugiron, who fell like a log, sighing:

"Jesus! O God! I am slain."

Livarot fell back in a swoon; his last action and his rage had exhausted all the strength that was left in him.

"M. de Quélus," said Anraguet, lowering his sword, "you are a brave man; yield, and I offer you your life."

"And why should I yield?" said Quélus; "am I lying on the ground?"

"No, but you are covered with wounds, and I am safe and sound."

"Long live the King! I have still my sword, monsieur."

And he made a cut at Anraguet, who parried the stroke, sudden though it was.

"No, monsieur, you have it no longer," said the latter, seizing the blade near the hilt.

And he twisted the arm of his adversary, who dropped the sword.

But, while doing so, Anraguet slightly cut one of the fingers of his left hand.

"Oh!" groaned Quélus, "a sword! a sword!"

And leaping like a tiger on Antraguët, he caught him in his arms.

Antraguët made no endeavor to free himself, but changing his sword from his right hand to his left, and his dagger from his left hand to his right, he stabbed him repeatedly in every part of his body, daubing him at each stroke with blood; yet he could not force his enemy to let go his hold; after every wound Quélus shouted: "Long live the King!"

He even managed to secure the hand that stabbed him, and coiled round his enemy with arms and legs like a serpent.

Antraguët felt that his breath would soon fail him.

In fact, after a second or so, he reeled and fell.

But, as if everything was to be in his favor on this day, he fell on top of Quélus, almost stifling the unfortunate young man.

"Long live the King!" murmured the latter, in tones of agony.

Antraguët succeeded at last in getting out of the clutch of his enemy, and, leaning on his arm, he drove the dagger into his chest, piercing him through and through.

"Well!" said he to him, "are you satisfied now?"

"Long live the" — articulated Quélus, his eyes fast closing.

All was finished; the silence and terror of death reigned over the field of battle.

Antraguët rose; he was covered with blood, but it was the blood of his enemy; as we have said, he himself had only had a scratch.

D'Épermon, horror-stricken, made the sign of the cross, and fled as if pursued by a spectre.

Antraguët looked at friends and enemies, the dead and the dying, as Horatius must have looked at the field of battle that decided the fate of Rome.

Chicot ran up and raised Quélus, whose blood was gushing forth from nineteen wounds.

The movement roused him.

He opened his eyes.

"Antraguët, upon my honor," said he, "I am innocent of Bussy's death."

"Oh! I believe you, monsieur, I believe you," answered Antraguët, much affected.

"Fly," murmured Quélus, "fly; the King would never forgive you."

"No, monsieur, I will not abandon you thus, though the scaffold be my portion."

"Escape at once, young man," said Chicot, "and do not tempt God. You have already escaped by a miracle; do not expect a second one the same day."

Antragnet approached Ribeirac, who was still breathing.

"Well?" asked the latter.

"We have conquered," answered Antragnet, in a whisper, so as not to offend Quélus.

"Thanks," said Ribeirac. "And now get away from here." And he fell back fainting.

Antragnet picked up his own sword, which he had dropped during the conflict, then the swords of Quélus, Schomberg, and Maugiron.

"Finish me, monsieur," said Quélus, "or else leave me my sword."

"Here it is, M. le Comte," answered Antragnet, offering it to him with a respectful bow.

A tear glistened in the eyes of the wounded man.

"We ought to have been friends," he murmured.

Antragnet tendered him his hand.

"It is well!" observed Chicot; "nothing could be more chivalrous and noble. But you must escape, Antragnet; you deserve to live."

"And my companions?" inquired the young man.

"I will take as much care of them as of the King's friends."

Antragnet wrapped himself up in a cloak which was handed to him by his squire, so that no one might see the blood with which he was covered, and, leaving the dead and wounded with the pages and lackeys, he disappeared through the Porte Saint-Antoine.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

CONCLUSION.

THE King, pale with anxiety, and shuddering at every sound, paced the floor of his armory, calculating, with all the experience of a man who was at home in such matters, the time it would take his friends to meet and engage their adversaries, as well as all the good and evil possibilities that might be augured from their temperament, strength, and address.

"They are now crossing the Rue Saint-Antoine," was his first thought.

"By this time they are entering the lists," he muttered, when some minutes had elapsed.

And after an interval:

"Ha! their swords are unsheathed; the combat is on at last!"

And then the poor monarch, trembling with fear, fell upon his knees.

But the prayer he uttered came rather from his lips than from his heart, which was almost entirely absorbed in thoughts that had little to do with devotion.

At the end of a few seconds, the King rose.

"If Quélus," said he, "only remember the peculiar parry and thrust I showed him — the parry with the sword and the thrust with the dagger at the same time.

"As for Schomberg, he is so cool that he ought to kill Ribeirac. Mangiron will be very unlucky if he does not easily make away with Livarot. But D'Épernon! ah! he is lost! Fortunately, he is the one of the four whom I love least. Alas! his death will not be the only calamity; it will leave Bussy, the terrible Bussy, at full liberty to fall on the others. Ah! my poor Quélus! my poor Schomberg! my poor Mangiron!"

"Sire!" said Crillon, outside the door.

"What! already?" exclaimed the King.

"No, sire, the only news I have for your Majesty is that the Duc d'Anjou requests an audience of your Majesty."

"For what purpose?" asked the King, still speaking through the door.

"He says the moment has come for him to inform your Majesty of the service he has rendered you, and that what he has to say will partly allay your apprehensions at the present moment."

"Well, bring him here," said the King.

But, just as Crillon was returning in pursuance of the royal orders, a rapid step was heard on the stairs, and a voice cried to Crillon:

"I must speak to the King immediately."

The King recognized the voice and opened the door himself.

"Come in, Saint-Luc, come in," he said. "What has hap-

pened now? Why, good heavens! what is the matter with you? Have you been told that they are dead?"

But Saint-Luc, without hat or sword, his face pale and his clothes spotted with blood, instead of answering the King, hurried into the centre of the hall.

"Sire!" he cried, flinging himself on his knees at the feet of the monarch. "Vengeance! I have come to ask for vengeance!"

"My poor Saint-Luc," said the King, "what is the meaning of all this? Speak. Why do you give way to such despair?"

"Sire, the noblest of your subjects, the bravest of your soldiers" — Here his voice failed him.

"Eh?" inquired Crillon, advancing a few steps, for Crillon believed he had certain rights, and a right to the last title, particularly.

"Was murdered last night, traitorously murdered, assassinated!" Saint-Luc was able to say at last with some effort.

The King, whose mind was entirely engrossed by one idea, felt reassured: it was not one of his four friends, since he had seen them all this morning.

"Murdered, assassinated, last night," said Henri. "Of whom are you speaking, pray?"

"Sire," continued Saint-Luc, "I am well aware you did not like him; but he was loyal, and I swear to you he would, if needful, have shed every drop of his blood for your Majesty; otherwise, he would not have been my friend."

"Ah!" exclaimed the King, who was beginning to understand.

And something like a gleam of hope, if not of joy, flitted across his face.

"Vengeance!" cried Saint-Luc, "vengeance, sire, for M. de Bussy!"

"For M. de Bussy?" repeated the King, dwelling on every syllable.

"Yes, for M. de Bussy, butchered by twenty assassins last night. And it was well for some of them that they were twenty: he killed fourteen."

"M. de Bussy dead!"

"Yes, sire."

"Then he does not fight this morning," said the King, suddenly, carried away by an impulse he could not resist.

The King was not able to endure the glance that Saint-Luc

hurled at him : on turning away his eyes, he saw Crillon, who was still standing near the door and waiting for new orders.

He made a sign to him to bring in the Duc d'Anjou.

"No, sire, he will not fight," answered Saint-Luc, sternly, "and so I have come to demand not vengeance — I was wrong to use the word before your Majesty — but justice ; for I love my King, and I prize his honor above all things else in the world, and I believe that they who have murdered M. de Bussy have rendered a deplorable service to your Majesty."

The Duc d'Anjou was now at the door ; he stood calm and impassive, like a statue of bronze.

Saint-Luc's words had enlightened the King ; they made clear to him the service which his brother claimed he had rendered him.

His eyes met the duke's, and he had no longer any doubt ; the look on the prince's face signified a yes, and this affirmation was emphasized by a scarcely perceptible nod.

"Do you know what people will say now ?" cried Saint-Luc. "They will say, should your friends conquer, your favorites owe their victory to the fact that you caused Bussy to be assassinated."

"And who will dare to say that, monsieur ?" asked the King.

"Everybody, by God !" said Crillon, taking part bluntly and unceremoniously in the conversation, as was his custom.

"No, monsieur," answered the King, disturbed and overpowered by the opinion of one who was the bravest man in his kingdom, now that Bussy was no more ; "no, monsieur, they cannot say that, for you shall name to me the assassin."

Saint-Luc noticed a shadow on the wall. It was that of the Duc d'Anjou, who had advanced into the room. Saint-Luc turned round and recognized him.

"Yes, sire, I will name him !" he cried, rising, "for I wish, at any risk, to show that your Majesty is not responsible for such an abominable deed."

"Well ! do so."

The Duc d'Anjou stood quietly waiting.

"Sire, last night a trap was set for Bussy. While he was visiting a woman who loved him, the husband, warned by a traitor, returned home with a band of assassins ; these assassins were posted everywhere : in the street, the courtyard, and even in the garden."

If the shutters, as we have related in a previous chapter, had not been closed in the King's apartment, the prince, in spite of his self-control, would have been seen to turn pale at these words.

"Bussy defended himself like a lion, sire, but overwhelmed by numbers, he" —

"He was killed, and justly; I am not going, certainly, to avenge the death of an adulterer."

"Sire, I have not finished," answered Saint-Luc. "The unfortunate man, after defending himself for nearly half an hour in the chamber, and after triumphing over his enemies, escaped, bleeding, wounded, mutilated. All he required was for some one to offer him a saving hand, which I would have offered him, had I not, along with the woman he confided to my charge, been seized, bound, and gagged by the assassins. Unfortunately for them, they did not deprive me of sight as well as of speech, and I saw, sire, — saw two men approach the unfortunate Bussy, who was suspended by the thigh from the spikes of an iron grating; I heard the wounded man's appeal for help, for he had the right to regard these two men as two friends. Well, sire, one of the two — it is horrible to relate, but, believe me, sire, it was far more horrible to see and to hear — one of the two ordered the other to fire, and that other obeyed."

Crillon clenched his hand and frowned.

"And you know the assassin?" inquired the King, affected, in spite of himself.

"Yes," answered Saint-Luc.

And, turning toward the prince, he said, in tones and with gestures that heightened the intensity of his long-repressed hatred:

"Monseigneur is the assassin! the prince, the friend is the assassin!"

The King had expected the blow, which the duke received without emotion.

"Yes," he said, coolly, "yes, what M. de Saint-Luc says he saw and heard is true; but it was I who had M. de Bussy killed, and your Majesty will appreciate my action, for it is true that M. de Bussy was my servant, but this morning, notwithstanding all my efforts to dissuade him from doing so, M. de Bussy insisted on bearing arms against your Majesty."

"You lie, assassin! you lie!" cried Saint-Luc. "Bussy

pierced by daggers, Bussy with his hands hacked by swords, Bussy with his shoulder shattered by bullets, Bussy hanging by the leg from an iron trellis, Bussy was no longer fit for anything except to excite the pity of his bitterest enemies, and his bitterest enemies would have flown to his aid. But you, the assassin of La Mole and Coconnas, you killed Bussy, as you have killed, one after another, all your friends; you killed Bussy, not because he was your brother's enemy, but because he was the confidant of your secrets. Ah! Monsoreau knew well why you committed this crime."

"*Cordieu!*" murmured Crillon, "why am not I the King!"

"I have to submit to insult, and that in your very presence, brother," said the duke, livid with terror, for the deadly hate that shone in Saint-Luc's eyes and the truculent scorn expressed by Crillon's attitude made him feel that he was not safe.

"Withdraw, Crillon," said the King.

Crillon passed out.

"Justice, sire, justice!" Saint-Luc continued to say.

"Yes, sire," said the duke, "punish me for saving your friends this morning and enabling you to ensure a brilliant vindication of your cause, which is also mine."

"And I," cried Saint-Luc, casting all self-restraint to the winds, "I say that any cause which you champion is accursed, and that the wrath of God blasts everything which you touch! Sire, sire! your brother protects our friends — woe to them!"

The King shook with terror.

At this very moment indistinct voices were heard outside, then hurried footsteps, and then eager questions, questions that were followed by a deathlike silence.

In the midst of the silence, as if a voice from heaven had come to confirm Saint-Luc's words, the door trembled under three blows slowly and solemnly struck by the vigorous hand of Crillon. .

A cold perspiration stood on Henri's forehead and his features were convulsed with agony.

"Conquered!" he cried, "my poor friends conquered!"

"What did I tell you, sire?" exclaimed Saint-Luc.

The duke wrung his hands in despair.

"Behold, dastard!" cried the young man, in a magnificent outburst of emotion; "behold the manner in which assassinations save the honor of princes! Come, then, and murder me, too; I have no sword!"

And he flung his silk glove into the duke's face.

François shrieked with fury and turned livid.

But the King saw nothing, heard nothing; he dropped his head on his hands and groaned.

"Oh! my poor friends," he murmured, "they are vanquished, wounded! Who will give some reliable tidings of them?"

"I, sire," answered Chicot.

The King recognized the voice of his friend, and held out his arms.

"Well?" said he.

"Two are dead already, and the third is at the last gasp."

"Which of them is the third who is not yet dead?"

"Quélus, sire!"

"And where is he?"

"At the Hôtel de Boissy, where I ordered him to be carried."

The King listened no further, but rushed out of his apartment, uttering piteous cries.

Saint-Lue had taken Diane home to her friend, Jeanne de Brissac; hence his delay in appearing at the Louvre.

Jeanne spent three days and three nights in attendance on the unhappy woman, who was a prey to the most frightful delirium.

On the fourth day, Jeanne, overpowered by fatigue, went to take a little rest. When she returned, two hours later, to her friend's chamber, Diane was no longer there.

It is known that Quélus, the only one of the three defenders of the royal cause that for a time survived his wounds, died in the hôtel to which he had been sent by Chicot, after an agony of thirty days, and in the arms of the King.

Henri was inconsolable.

He erected for his friends three magnificent tombs, on which their effigies were sculptured in marble and in their natural size.

He founded masses for them, asked the prayers of the clergy in their behalf, and added to his usual orisons the following distich, which he repeated every day of his life after his morning and evening prayers:

"O Jesus Christ! have mercy on
Quélus, Schomberg, and Maugiron!"

For nearly three months Crillon kept watch over the Due d'Anjou, for whom the King now entertained the deepest hatred, and whom he never forgave.

Matters continued in this way until the month of September, when Chicot, who was always with his master, and who would have consoled him had consolation been possible, received the following letter, dated from the priory of Beaune. It was written by an amanuensis:

“DEAR M. CHICOT:

“The air is pleasant in this country of ours, and the vintage promises to be very fine in Burgundy this year. I have been told that the King, our sovereign lord, whose life it would seem I saved, is still sorrowful. Bring him with you to the priory, dear M. Chicot. We'll get him to drink a wine of 1550, which I discovered in my cellar, and which is capable of making those who drink it forget all their troubles, however great they may be; he will be delighted to hear this, I have no doubt, for I have found in the Holy Book this admirable text: ‘Good wine rejoiceth the heart of man!’ It is very beautiful in Latin. I will show it to you. Come, then, dear M. Chicot; come with the King and M. d'Épernon and M. de Saint-Luc; and you'll see how we'll fatten you all up.

“The reverend prior DOM GORENFLOT,
who declares himself your very humble servant and friend.

“P.S. — Please tell the King I have not had time to pray for the souls of his friends as he requested, on account of the trouble my installation has given me; but, as soon as the vintage comes to an end, I will certainly attend to them.”

“Amen!” said Chicot. “These poor devils will have a nice sort of a mediator with God when you do!”

END.



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